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JUNE

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A MATTER OF WELFARE

The lively and laughable LAC Likely made his bow two months ago. Now, in response to readers' requests for more, here is a new comic tangle

BY HARRY SUTTON

"COR! Ruddy women!" said Chalky. "There's even one in the guardroom. Female flatfoot." He sniffed indignantly. "And now we're supposed to be nice and kind to 'em too. Huh!"

"It makes yer sick, dunnit?" said Fred.

They stared at Station Routine Orders in outraged silence.

"Station Entertainments," they read. "Now that the station has been given a WRAF establishment it becomes necessary for a review to be made of station welfare and entertainments in order to ensure that the needs of the airwomen are catered for equally with those of the airmen. A meeting of the Station Entertainments Committee is to be held on Friday next to discuss ways of implementing this policy. Personnel who have suggestions to make with regard to improved welfare or entertainments are to put forward their proposals to their appropriate committee representative forthwith."

Chalky and Fred considered the notice for a moment.

"Welfare!" said Fred, bitterly. "Best welfare for that lot 'd be to send 'em back where they come from."

"What sort of things would you call welfare, Fred?" asked Chalky, thoughtfully.

Fred reflected for a moment. "Extra blankets, better grub; that sort of thing, I should think," he said.

"Do you reckon 'airdressing comes into welfare?" Chalky asked.

Please turn to page 4

In mid-step they stopped
as Uncle Eddie was
dragged towards them

"Could do, I s'pose," admitted Fred, doubtfully. "But what's that got to do with us?"

"I got an idea," said Chalky. " 'Oo's our committee bloke?"

"LAC Likely," Fred told him. "Our lot's in with sick quarters for entertainment—and the best they can think up is aspirin and ruddy bingo twice a month."

"Come on," said Chalky. "Let's go and put our proposals forward, mate." On the way he told Fred what he had in mind.

LAC Likely had just taken Sergeant Smith's first afternoon cup of tea to him when they reached sick quarters.

"Sick parade's at oh-eight-hundred-hours," he told them, sharply. "The Doc can't see you now."

"We're not sick, Samuel," said Chalky, soothingly. "We've jus' come to 'ave a nice cup of tea with yer, that's all."

Likely looked at them with great suspicion. He preferred Fred and Chalky hostile. At least he then knew where he stood with them. Friendliness almost always meant trouble.

"What's wrong with 'aving tea in your own section, then?"

"Nothin' at all, Sammy boy," said Chalky. "We was jus' passin' and thought we'd call in and 'ave a little chat."

"Seein' as how you're our representative on the entertainments committee," said Fred.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Likely.

" 'Aven't you read SROs?" asked Chalky, reprovingly. "Every erk is s'posed to read them, y'know. No excuse taken if you're put down for something, a meetin' of a committee for example, and don't turn up."

"Haven't you heard that there's to be a meetin' of the entertainments committee, then?" asked Fred.

Likely considered this for a moment. It had been a great disappointment to him when the entertainments committee gave up meeting. He was a great believer in people having activities organised for them. Sick parades were full of blokes with imaginary illnesses—neurotics. And it was all caused by boredom. There was a whole chapter on it in *The Psychology of Living* which he had found on the MO's bookshelf. It was good news, indeed, that the entertainments committee was to start again.

"It's about time something was organised," he said.

"That's jus' what me and Fred was saying," Chalky told him. "Especially now there's all these Waafs."

Likely's suspicions deepened. "Why are you two so interested in welfare and entertainments all of a sudden?" he asked.

"Well," said Chalky, "we've got a proposal for you to put forward, as our committee representative."

FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW WHAT AN ERK IS

Glossary of Service terms used in this story

Erk: Airman below the rank of non-commissioned officer
LAC: Leading Aircraftman
LACW: Leading Aircraftwoman
SRO: Station Routine Orders
SWO: Station Warrant Officer (Equivalent to Regimental Sergeant-Major in the Army)
Tech. Wing: Technical Wing
Wingco Admin: Wing-Commander in charge of Administration
Waaf: Member of the Women's Royal Air Force (the name is derived from the former name of the Service—Women's Auxiliary Air Force)
Waaf G. (also WRAF G.): Waaf Officer in charge of general administration

"It's for the good of the Waafs, mostly," said Fred. "Though it could 'elp the blokes too, I suppose, really."

"What is it then?" asked Likely.

"We think there should be a 'airdressing saloon on the camp—for the Waafs," said Chalky.

"But the barber's shop's been closed for months," objected Likely, "and the bloke in the village would never come up to camp; and any'ow, his main job's sheep-shearing."

"No need to ask 'im, mate," said Fred. "Me and Chalky 'ave 'ad extensive experience of cuttin' hair—at least Chalky 'as."

"But why should the Waafs want 'airdressing?" asked Likely.

"Welfare," said Chalky. "Girls always goes and 'as their 'air done when they're browned off. Makes 'em feel better."

"S'right," agreed Fred. "My sister's jus' like that. 'As a flamin' row with her latest boy friend, threatens to kill 'erself with grief, then goes off to get her 'air done instead. Comes 'ome with it piled up on top of her nob in a great 'eap, or combed straight down in front so she can't see out; and some'ow it seems to make 'er feel better."

LAC Likely considered their proposition in silence.

"But can you *reely* cut hair?" he asked.

Chalky reassured him. "And you don't *cut* 'air, mate," he said. "Not fer birds. You trim and set it or perm it. You never cut it."

But Likely was not convinced. "If I suggest it, how do I know it won't end up with me being blamed for girls complaining about 'aving their 'air ruined and that? Blokes get sued for damages for making a muck of people's hair, you know."

"Look, mate," said Fred. "You leave that to us. All you got to do is put it up at the committee as *our* idea."

"And then you can suggest we 'ave some nice station dances so the Waafs can show their 'air-do's off."

"That's it," said Fred. "You suggest dances too. You can be MC."

"You'd make a good MC, Samuel," Chalky told him. "Blimey, I'd come to a dance meself if you was MC."

But there was no need to push their luck any further. LAC Likely was already sold. "I'll see what I can do," he promised them.

The entertainments committee was not easily convinced. Likely's proposal that there should be station dances once a week had been accepted, though at a frequency of only one a month, on a trial basis; and his offer to act as MC though not accepted with the alacrity he would have expected, was not actually turned down. But his suggestion about opening the barber's shop was having a very rough passage indeed.

The Wingco Admin, in fact, seemed determined to resist to the death.

"It's a frightfully tricky business, cutting women's hair," he insisted. "I mean it's done by chaps with beards and peculiar names. A couple of erks would make a ghastly mess of it."

"LAC White has had a year's experience, sir," Likely assured him. "In East Ham."

"LAC White has had many experiences on this very station," the Wingco told him. "But none of them could be considered pertinent to the art of dressing hair."

A fuddy-duddy old Wingco could be expected to react in this way, of course, but Likely had expected better things from the Waaf G. She also failed to grasp the advantages of the proposal.

"I certainly agree that the girls could do with a good hairdresser on the camp," she said. "But a couple of young airmen . . . Could we not get somebody to come in on contract in the usual way, sir?"

The Wingco shuddered. "Hairdressers don't seem to fit into our routine for some reason," he told her. "We have had three. One resigned after three days. The second lost a fight with a dissatisfied customer; the third gave unrealistic odds against last year's Derby winner and very prudently welshed."

"Ah, *ex nihilo nihil fit*," sighed the Padre.

"Chalky—I mean LAC White, wants to do it voluntary, of course, sir, out of working hours," said Likely. "He said to make a particular point of that."

It was at this moment in the committee's deliberations that matters suddenly went into a flat spin. The Wingco was just about to make a sarcastic statement with regard to the plausibility of Chalky's self-sacrifice, when there was a most extraordinary intervention.

Sitting opposite LAC Likely was a rather pretty, demure, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-her-mouth, little Waaf. Her name was Leading Aircraftwoman Doris Dearlove. And she was the airwomen's representative on the committee.

Now she said, sweetly and with a charming smile, "I would like to support LAC Likely's proposal, sir, if I may."

There was a stunned silence for a moment.

"You *what*?" asked the Wingco.

"I think it's a very good idea. The girls will want to get their hair done."

Squadron Officer Brightwell decided the time had come for sterner measures.

"I'm sure that what you say is *absolutely* true, Dearlove," she told her, "but you can't really be serious about it. A proper hairdresser—yes, by all means. But a couple of young airmen!"

"And I don't think it's on anyway," added the Wingco. "I mean there's all kinds of regulations about barbers' shops. Hygiene; the chaps have to pay rent for the shop; Works and Bricks come into it somewhere too . . ." He looked desperately round the committee. Then his eyes lighted on the face of LACW Doris Dearlove.

"It would be a great shame to have that very pretty hair ruined, my dear," he said with an ingratiating but unconvincing smile.

"LAC White *can* cut hair, sir," said Likely, inspired to heroic resistance by the Waaf's sudden support. "He told me so."

Doris Dearlove flashed a sweet smile across to him and as the flush of surprise and pleasure spread down Likely's neck, she gave the assembled committee the *coup de grâce*.

"LAC White has done my hair often, as a matter of fact," she said. "I used to go to him when he was a civvy hairdresser." She looked reassuringly round the table. "He's ever so good," she said. "All my friends used to have him do their hair."

"You were wonderful," said LACW Dearlove, as they walked to the canteen together after the meeting. "I was thrilled by the way you stood up to them."

LAC Likely squirmed ecstatically. "It was you, really," he said. "I thought they'd all have a bloomin' fit when you said

Chalky had done your hair before." He considered this for a moment. " 'Ow did you come across Chalky then?" he asked, casually, but with sudden doubt.

"I didn't, silly," said Doris, with a little giggle. "I only said that so you would get your way." She turned towards him and Likely suddenly found himself looking deep into two round, innocent blue eyes.

"I s'pose they do know about hairdressing?" she asked.

Likely swallowed hard. "Well," he said, lamely. "Chalky does. Leastways, he says he does."

"Oh dear," said Doris, suddenly alarmed. "I do hope I haven't let the girls in for anything they might regret."

Likely looked at her anxiously. Then a sudden awareness of male responsibility hit him. He drew himself up; his jaw squared.

"Leave that to me," he said. "I'll see you don't regret nothing."

"Oh, *thank* you, Samuel," said Doris, gratefully.

Chalky White and Fred Bates were in the canteen when they arrived, and LAC Likely steered Doris Dearlove straight to their table. His manner was strange to them. He seemed suddenly more self-assured—almost jaunty in the way he introduced LACW Dearlove.

"Meet Doris," he said, casually, pulling out a chair for her. He waved a hand at the two open-mouthed erks. "Chalky White and Fred Bates," he told Doris. "Couple of friends of mine."

"How do you do?" said Doris.

"All right, thanks," said Chalky staring, expressionless.

"Okay, thanks jus' the same," said Fred, equally staggered.

"We just come from the committee," said Likely. " 'Ad a bit of trouble over the 'airdressing."

"Samuel was ever so impressive," Doris told them. "He *made* them agree to it."

"Go on?" said Chalky, open-mouthed.

"It was *her* really," said Likely, modestly. "She said she'd known you before, Chalky." He gave a mirthless laugh and slapped his knee. "You'd cut her 'air and done it real well!"

"You did?" said Chalky, looking in amazement at Doris. "Why d'you say that?"

"So you could start up the hairdressing, of course," said Doris. "They would have turned it down otherwise."

"Oh, I see," said Chalky, absently.

"You was very realistic, Doris," said Likely, admiringly. "You really took me in!"

"Well, it's all in a good cause, isn't it?" said Doris brightly.

"You boys'll have to get a move on now, won't you, so that we girls can pretty ourselves up for the dance."

Chalky and Fred stared at each other in silence for a moment. This was an entirely new experience for both of them. It was Fred who regained his morale first.

"Well," he said, bravely. "We're in business then. 'Ere's to White and Bates Limited, 'Aircutters and Shampooers."

OLD Joe Grimes, the stoker, was very fond of Fred and Chalky. There was always a nice cup of tea for them when they called to see him in the central boiler house. In season, as often as not, they brought him a hare or a rabbit, and sometimes even a pheasant, to take home to his missus.

" 'Ere y'are, Dad," they would say, producing the spoils from inside their battledress blouses or some other unlikely place. And old Joe would stump off on his wooden leg to hide them in the darkness of the coal bunkers where not even the questing eye of the SWO could penetrate.

Yes. Old Joe was certainly fond of Chalky and Fred. But even the greatest of friendships have limits. And old Joe's limit had just about been reached.

"Oi doan mind 'ee a clippin' of 'un," he told them, patiently, "but this a-curlin' on it doan make no sense. Oi be goin' tu look main soft."

But Fred and Chalky paid no attention to him. They merely told him he was dead lucky to have his hair done for free, and pressed on regardless.

Old Joe was a very good subject for experimental hairdressing. His wooden leg reduced his mobility to essential journeys, such as from his cottage in the village to the Black Swan round the corner. A visit to the barber's shop was a very unusual expedition indeed. The Grimes family was known for its good strong hair and Joe's was stronger than most. It flowed over his collar at the back and round his ears on each side. He had a really good head of hair.

"It's all on the 'ouse," Fred had said, as he helped him into the barber's chair in the newly opened shop. But when he told them, "Short back and sides, matey," in the usual way, they had begun to explain exactly what it was he would be given on the house.

"You see, Joe," said Chalky. " 'Airdressin' 'as progressed somethink astonishing since I did my apprenticeship. There's shampoos in little bags called satchits and settin' lotions what you spray on the 'air to keep it neat and tidy. An' there's these

'ome perms. We got to know all the latest techniques, 'aven't we?"

"You're goin' to 'ave the advantage of all this modern progress, Joe," Fred told him. "You're lucky, mate!"

When he protested about the perm, saying that they'd laugh him out of the bar down at the Mucky Duck, they told him he was thoroughly ungrateful. Many a bloke would pay pounds and pounds to have his hair done over with a home perm, they said. And anyway, if he insisted upon it, they would use the shampoo satchit on him last of all and that, of course, would wash the perm out.

It was with this understanding that Joe submitted to the ordeal. But almost at once, he regretted it. Chalky and Fred seemed to have fallen further behind in the march of progress than would have seemed possible. They seemed to be going right back to basics.

"You read it out, Fred," said Chalky, "and I'll 'ave a bash."

"Right," said Fred, concentrating his attention upon the small print before him. " 'Starry—the curly-wirly perm that stays beautiful'," he read, slowly. " 'Use only with Starry Double-grip Phantom Curlers'."

"Skip that bit," said Chalky. "Get on to the instructions."

"Okay," said Fred. He turned the leaflet over. " 'Note carefully'," he read out, " 'If your 'air 'as been bleached or tinted, restored or treated with any brightening product, Starry home perm may cause it to break off at the roots'."

" 'Ave you been puttin' any muck of that sort on it, Joe?" asked Chalky.

"On'y Brylcreem," Joe said.

"Shouldn't think that'd do any 'arm," said Chalky.

Fred read on: "Then it says, 'Never drink the liquid or the neutraliser; they could be 'armful'."

"Oh get on with it," urged Chalky. "Read the bit where it tells you about the ruddy curlers and things."

"Okay," said Fred, a little hurt. "But you've got to know 'ow dangerous it is, 'aven't you. I mean we don't want to 'ave poor old Joe's 'air fallin' out all over the place, do we?"

"No," said Joe, "We doan, an' that's a fact."

"Look," said Chalky, "you're gettin' me nervous now. Do get on with it."

"Have 'air clean and damp," said Fred.

Chalky looked carefully at Joe's hair. "Blimey," he said. "That's a ruddy bad start, that is. Your 'air's filthy, Joe, innit?"

"Aye," said Joe. "That it is."

"Shouldn't think it'll matter," said Fred. "This is fer birds. It probably don't apply to a bloke—like Joe."

"Okay," said Chalky. "We'll skip it then. What next?"

" 'Part off a tress of 'air as wide as a curler; soak the tress in the waving lotion, comb it out and wind it round a Starry Double-grip Phantom Curler, wetting each tress with the waving lotion as you go'."

"What the 'ell's a tress?" asked Chalky, with a frown.

"Accordin' to the picture, it's just a lump of 'air what you comb out," explained Fred.

"Okay," said Chalky. " 'Ere we go then."

It was a bad experience for old Joe and only real strong affection for Chalky and Fred kept him in the chair. He did protest once or twice, such as the time some of the lotion got in his eye and again when Fred became so absorbed in Chalky's efforts with the curlers that he let his cigarette drop down Joe's neck and gave him quite a nasty burn.

But at last it was over and Joe's head was completely covered with pink and blue Starry Double-grip Phantom Curlers. They were set at all angles, some stretched tight against Joe's scalp where Chalky had been particularly successful; others dangling loosely where he had not done so well. The two airmen stopped for a moment to survey their work.

"What now?" asked Chalky. And Fred consulted the leaflet.

"Wait twenty minutes," he read.

"What!" exclaimed Chalky. "You mean we got to wait all that time after each one? Blimey, we won't get more than a couple through this lot between tea and the NAAFI closing."

"They line 'em up in rows to wait," Fred told him. "You can see 'em in proper 'airdressing saloons. They wear ruddy great bone domes with wires fixed to 'em."

"Go on?" said Chalky, impressed by Fred's knowledge. "Well, we'd better practise that then, too." He turned to old Joe. "Come on then, Joe," he said, "Come and sit over 'ere. We ain't got a bone dome for yer, mate, but I reckon you can do without one jus' this once."

The three of them sat in silence for a few minutes. Then Joe ventured a comment.

"My scalp bain 'arf stretched," he said. "The 'air do zeem to be tearin' out of 'un."

Chalky looked at him unsympathetically. "You don't 'alf carry on," he said. "You've been grumbling ever since we started. I 'ope as how them ruddy birds don't make such a ruddy fuss." And the three lapsed once more into a gloomy silence.

After a bit, Fred plugged in the steriliser provided by a cautious Ministry as standard for all service barbers' shops, and made a cup of tea. A little later, Joe produced a coal-encrusted pack of cards and they had a couple of hands of solo. Chalky always said that Joe himself was really to blame for that twenty minutes running on to half-an-hour and then to forty minutes. They were his cards, after all, and he could have stopped them playing any time he wished. As it was, they overran the time given in the instructions leaflet by just over one hundred per cent.

They poured the neutralising solution on to Joe's head, in the correct manner, and then, as Fred slowly read the rest of the instructions, Chalky removed the Starry Double-grip Phantom Curlers, one by one.

Released from their curlers, Joe's tresses seemed possessed of some new-found power. They remained obstinately coiled in tight little parcels all over his head and when Chalky drew one out to its full length, it sprang back into place again like a watch spring.

Joe was not a vain man, and he had not, hitherto, fussed unduly about his appearance. But this, even for him, was not tolerable. He objected, heatedly.

"You don't 'ave to worry about that, mate. It'll wash out," Chalky assured him, but his voice was weak and carried little assurance.

"Ee'd better an' all," said Joe.

They washed it, not using the sachets of shampoo, which were for show purposes only. LAC Wilkes had been persuaded to donate a beer bottle full of the detergent used in the cookhouse dishwashing machine, and, as Fred told Joe, you could hardly have a better liquid shampoo than that.

Joe's hair certainly looked better after it was washed. It once more hung limp over his ears with only a little crimping here and there to show where it had been subjected to the beautifying process of the Starry curly-wirly perm.

But when Fred began to dry it with the fan-heater, unscrewed from the wall for the purpose, the effectiveness of their work became gradually apparent. Joe, staring into the mirror, watched with mounting horror as his hair sprang into life. First to appear were broad waves. These soon broke, in the hot-air blast from the fan-heater, into little ripples and then into foam. Soon, Joe's head was covered, all over, with thick brown frizz, the white in it showing in places like froth on top of a well-poured beer.

"Cor," said Chalky, incredulously. "That's a set-up, innit?"

But Joe was speechless. He almost leaped out of the chair and, grabbing his coat, made for the door. His peg-leg stumped an angry tattoo as he went and the two airmen knew better than to get in his way.

They watched him from the door as he mounted his one-pedalled bicycle. His old felt hat was pulled down as hard as he could get it over his brow, but even so, a generous fringe of frizz had escaped it and could be seen, a fuzzy halo round his neck. Chalky and Fred looked unhappily at one another.

" 'E didn't seem all that grateful, did 'e?" remarked Fred.

FRED BATES looked nervously round the barber's shop at the stolid, silent Waafs lining the walls.

"Chalky—er—Mr. White, will be 'ere any time now," he assured them. "He's the 'airdresser, reely. I'm only sort of cashier."

"I thought it was goin' to be free," said one hard-faced Aircraftwoman. "It said so in SROs."

"Oh, it *is* free," Fred assured her, hoping desperately that Chalky would not be too long delayed. "But you 'ave to pay for materials like permanent wave lotion and shampoo an' that."

"How much is it, then?" asked another Waaf, who looked capable of enforcing the provisions of SROs, appealing, in the last resort, to the Air Minister, if necessary.

Fred produced a notice, carefully and optimistically drawn up before the Joe Grimes *débâcle*, and displayed it nervously to the row of increasingly critical Waafs. TARRIF, it declared:

Haircut	—	free
Shampoo	—	5/–
Sett	—	2/6
Perm	—	10/–

A murmur of discontent spread through the WRAF ranks and Fred was about to be subjected to a most searching cross-examination, when a diversion occurred. Into the barber's shop came Chalky, closely followed by LAC Likely. Fred's jaw dropped loose at the sight. Chalky's right arm was swathed in a fat bandage and it hung, pathetically, in a sling. He seemed, in contrast to his sad appearance, in excellent spirits.

"I 'ave bad news for you ladies, I'm afraid," he said, cheerfully, as the row of Waafs gazed curiously at him. "I came a cropper off me bike and got a nasty sprain."

LAC Likely came forward, busily. "I'm afraid I had to strap it up," he said. "There's a nasty swelling there."

Fred was so surprised he almost let the cat out of the bag.

Chalky's wrist always looked swollen on account of it having been broken and badly set when he was a kid.

"Well, there it is," said Chalky, with regretful finality. "The hairdressin' business has 'ad it I'm afraid—for the time bein' anyway."

Fred felt a warm glow of relief as he became aware of the genius behind Chalky's act. The vision of Joe's frizz had haunted them both all day, and this sudden release from it made him quite light-headed.

"Well!" he said, almost jauntily. "You ladies'll 'ave to find another hairdresser, won't you?"

A sense of crisis spread along the row of Waafs. There was to be a station dance, organised and MC'd by LAC Likely, on Saturday night, and without adequate hair-do's, the prospect was bleak indeed. A chorus of protest and anger was just starting when out of the Waaf ranks, one emerged to revolutionise the whole situation. LACW Doris Dearlove, silent until that moment, stepped forward.

"Perhaps I can be of assistance," she said, sweetly. "I used to be a hairdresser in civvy street."

All eyes became focused, some with hope, some with surprise —and two pairs at least, with growing suspicion—on Doris.

She walked over to the chair, and they saw that she had a brown paper parcel under her arm.

"Oo!" she said, unwrapping the parcel with wonder at the coincidence. "Would you believe it! I happen to have my old hairdressing overalls with me too!"

"She'll have to go," said Chalky.

Fred nodded gloomily as he considered the situation. "It makes yer sick," he said, "dunnit?"

Aircraftwoman Dearlove had taken charge of the barber's shop and her reputation amongst the Waafs was growing daily. Leading Aircraftwomen, Senior Aircraftwomen, Corporals and even the Waaf Flight Sergeant herself, had all passed through Doris' experienced hands. And sleek, glamorous hair-do's (all strictly in accordance with the licence permitted by Authority, the Waaf G. noted with satisfaction), proliferated all over the camp; testifying, in the satisfied smiles of their owners, to Doris' undeniable skill.

The Waafs, glorious now in their proud hair styles, took on a new, more aggressive attitude to life on the camp. And the erks, impressed by their improved morale, reacted with an occasional, comforting wolf-whistle as some particularly tasty dish

passed jauntily down the main camp road. All was harmony on the station. All, that is, except the bit inhabited by LACs Chalky White and Fred Bates.

Their belief that they had escaped from the hazards of ladies hairdressing, as revealed by Joe Grimes, had proved false. Station routine orders have the force of authority behind them, as Doris pointed out to them when they tried to leave the barber's shop to her.

"I'm only here to give you a hand," she told them, when they suggested that she was doing all right without them. "The SRO has got your names in it and it wouldn't do for the CO to come round and find me running it alone."

So they reported for duty every evening after tea and whilst Doris clipped and set and shampooed and permed, chatting happily all the time to her contented customers, Fred and Chalky swept up, cleaned the basin out, kept a kettle of hot water always ready and generally helped around the place. At the end of each session, Doris gave them half-a-crown each, as their share of the takings, putting the rest, often as much as two pounds ten, in her own pocket, "to cover expenses".

As Chalky rightly said, she would certainly have to go. But the question which haunted them, day and night was—how?

It so happened that at this very fateful moment Chalky's Uncle Edward made one of his periodic appearances on the scene. It was his custom, once or twice a year, to stay a few days at the Mucky Duck where he signed the register under a variety of interesting and imaginative aliases to which the proprietor, Bob Small, was now quite accustomed. And he usually stayed for a week or ten days, before leaving as suddenly as he had arrived.

There were two circumstances under which Uncle Eddie would take up residence in the country. One was if he was on the run, in which case it was likely that he would be skint. The other was if he was only hiding up, in which event he could be expected to dispense hospitality with a generous hand. On this occasion, it was apparent to Chalky that his uncle was skint.

"Lend us a fiver, sonny, will yer?" he asked his reluctant nephew, almost as soon as they met. "I shall 'ave a pony in the post by the end of the week if certain plans work out. I'll give yer five per cent on it."

"Ten;" Chalky had insisted, and that arranged, Chalky and Fred accepted Uncle Eddie's hospitality in the bar parlour.

It was the third pint which brought the great idea to Chalky's mind. They had been discussing Doris Dearlove and had explored every possible eventuality, from poison to coronary

thrombosis, when Fred suddenly said, "I s'pose there's no 'ope of 'er gettin' 'ooked by some poor bloke?"

" 'Ow would that help?" asked Uncle Eddie.

"Help!" exclaimed Chalky, suddenly excited. "Of course it'd help. If they get spliced they 'ave to leave—become civvies—'ook it—scapa—see?"

Uncle Eddie and Fred looked at him in surprise. Desirable though it might be, neither of them could see how such a consummation could be contrived. Chalky looked at them both, his eyes gleaming with triumph.

"Uncle Eddie," he said. "How'd you like to turn over a quick fifteen quid?"

Samuel Likely surveyed the crowded dance floor from his commanding position on the band platform and a sense of real power swept over him. It was obvious that he had a remarkable flair for this sort of thing and the sudden realisation of it gave him reckless self-confidence.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he announced, the amplification speakers turning his words to incomprehensible noise round the hall, "We are goin' to have a real treat. A ladies' excuse-me waltz! Take your partners, everyone."

He turned to the band, one hand raised theatrically aloft. "Swing it, fellas!" he exclaimed, his spectacles glinting in the glare from two aircraft servicing lights reluctantly loaned by Tech. Wing.

The leader of the Sky Demon Four blew a starting chord on his sax.

"He's a ripe 'un, ain't he?" he commented to the electric guitarist, as they prepared to go into the opening bars of *The Anniversary Waltz*.

"Can I have the pleasure?" asked LACW Dearlove, coming up to Likely, "or are you too grand and important tonight?"

"Never too important to dance with you, Doris!" said Samuel. And the two went off together, one-two-threeing in perfect time, Doris leading firmly but not too conspicuously.

Never, mused Samuel, had his charm and natural ability been exercised to better effect.

It was a great shame that this personal triumph should have to be spoiled and Chalky, standing with Fred and Uncle Eddie in the bar, felt really bad about it as he saw the two of them dancing so happily together. But there it was. The thing had to be done. And that was all there was to it.

The moment they chose was just after the Station Commander

and the Wingco Admin came in to pay their usual routine visit; to dance with a couple of Waafs, have a pint with the lads and then push off with as decent haste as possible. The Waaf G. was with them. Chalky waited until they were all three on the dance floor and then dragging Uncle Eddie almost forcibly away from the bar, he led him across to where Likely and Doris Dearlove were dancing together, for the third time running.

"Is this her, Mr. Dearlove?" Chalky asked, in a penetratingly loud voice.

Uncle Eddie, mercifully sober enough to remember his lines, looked at Doris with realistic tears in his eyes.

"That's her," he said. "That's my Doris. My little girl."

The two dancers stopped in mid-step and couples round them drew closer to investigate the fuss.

"Are you addressing me, by any chance?" asked Doris.

"You know perfectly well I am, darlin'," said Uncle Eddie, who was now beginning to get the feel of things. "Me and our two kids 'ave been missin' you somethink terrible since you left 'ome."

"How dare you!" shouted Doris. "I don't know who you are and I can only imagine that you are making a terrible mistake."

"You are Mrs. Doris Dearlove, are you not?" asked Uncle Eddie, who was now beginning to enjoy himself.

"*Miss* Dearlove," said Doris, who by now was shaking with anger and not far off tears.

The disturbance had caused such a crowd to collect that the members of the band took the opportunity to break off for the beer and sandwiches provided for them in the adjoining billiard room. And the voices of Doris and Uncle Eddie had become so shrill that the Group Captain and Wingco Admin felt it their duty to investigate the trouble.

Doris, weeping softly, was escorted by the Waaf G. to her quarters. Uncle Eddie, almost too plausible in his full-blooded assumption of the role of deserted husband, was driven back to the Mucky Duck in Group Captain Holmes' staff car. And LAC Likely, his world crashed about his ears, handed over the job of MC to LAC Wilkes, and went off to bed.

"YOU poor girl!" exclaimed the Waaf G., looking at LACW Dearlove with deep sympathy. "No wonder you left him."

It was the day after the unfortunate incident at the station dance and Squadron Officer Brightwell was trying to get the business straightened out. She had to admit that she had begun

the interview strongly biased against Dearlove. There was something about her she did not trust. Something told her that the girl was sly—not to be trusted. And now it had all come out. It showed just how wrong one could be!

"So he never married you then—after all that?" she asked the girl.

Doris nodded, miserably. "He said I wasn't good enough for him," she said, through her tears. "I had the children properly adopted so now there's no real reason why he should want me back."

Squadron Officer Brightwell nodded understandingly. "And yet," she said, "you are now prepared to marry him properly?"

Doris buried her face in her handkerchief and her shoulders shook with the emotion of grief and embarrassment.

"It's the right thing to do, reely," she said. "I'm sure it is."

"All right, my dear," said the Squadron Officer, brushing away a tear, "we'll go down to the village together and see him."

"Look, lads," said Uncle Eddie, taking an elegant sip from his double whisky. "You asked me ter do it—an' I done it. Now it's up to you to see that a poor deserted 'usband is properly looked after."

Chalky and Fred licked dry lips and stared at him. There was no doubt that Uncle Eddie had got himself into a very strong position. When they told him they could not pay the fifteen pounds promised for services rendered at the station dance, he had told them to forget it. He would stay at the Mucky Duck for a week or two—just long enough for LACW Dearlove to be discharged from the service, and they could repay him by settling the bill. They had checked that evening with Bob Small and already they owed him seven pounds ten, and Uncle Eddie was ordering double whiskies as though they were lemonade.

They were just about to appeal to him on the grounds of human decency, with Chalky calling in the factor of their family relationship to add weight, when LAC Likely came in.

He walked straight up to Uncle Eddie and said, clear and distinct so that everybody in the bar could hear, "I'm goin' to give you the thrashin' of your life, you dirty cad!"

" 'Oo—me?" asked Uncle Eddie, surprised.

"Yes, you," said Likely, and slowly, with quiet deliberation, he removed his spectacles, put them carefully in his breast pocket and without further ado, took a flying leap at Uncle Eddie, both fists flailing.

Now if he had been given time, Chalky could have warned

Likely that in his particular walk of life Uncle Eddie needed to be a pretty useful number when it came to a scrap. As, in fact, he was. And before Likely had even got to within striking distance, Uncle Eddie landed a straight left into his prominently displayed solar-plexus, following this, as Likely's head came down in a paroxysm of agony, with a short jab to the chin.

"You didn't need to 'ave 'it the poor bloke that 'ard," complained Chalky as they brought Likely round.

" 'Ard?" exclaimed Uncle Eddie. "Blimey, the poor little chap ran on to me fist."

At last, spitting blood and groaning a bit, Samuel Likely sat up and asked where he was. When they told him, he at once resumed the rage which had previously fired him.

"You cad," he said to Uncle Eddie. "You don't deserve to lick 'er boots and yet, despite that, she's goin' to marry you!" He turned to Chalky and Fred accusingly. "It's your fault," he told them. "You shouldn't 'ave brought them together again." He shook with emotion. It had all been a great strain. "I would 'ave asked her to marry me if she hadn't insisted on goin' back to him!"

Uncle Eddie turned paler. He gripped Likely by the lapel.

"What's that you say?" he hissed. " 'Oo's goin' to marry 'oo?"

"Doris," said Likely in a broken voice. "She and the Squadron Officer are on the way 'ere now to make arrangements for her to marry you. I come on in advance on my bike."

The blokes in the bar said afterwards that they had never seen anybody get out of a pub so quickly. One moment Uncle Eddie was there; the next moment he was gone. He took Samuel Likely's bicycle for the first five miles and PC Brown found it outside the railway station at Little Puddington.

Chalky and Fred very kindly agreed to LAC Likely taking their half-share of the hairdressing business and he was as happy as could be, helping Doris there of an evening.

Chalky had to agree, besides, that Doris wasn't such a bad sort when it came to helping friends. She gave him all the takings of the next week's business in the barber's shop which left him just thirty-bob over when he'd paid Uncle Eddie's bill at the Mucky Duck. He and Fred used it to buy her a nice doll and some tin soldiers to give to her two kids when next she went to see them. It was just a reminder, they told her, of her past associations.

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Next month: The sound of wedding bells is in the air, and LAC Likely has another chance to show his resourcefulness

I was left alone with a
man in plain clothes whose
name I was not told

He had been trained to kill,
yet every moment he grew more afraid

diary of a mercenary

BY GERALD SINSTADT

PETKOV was standing at the office window when the messenger entered and coughed respectfully. "Put it on the desk," said Petkov without turning.

"Yes, sir." Though the messenger knew that they were equals in the eyes of the State, he knew, too, that he was in the presence of someone who expected acknowledgement of authority. "Is that all, sir?"

The man at the window did not reply. He was looking down at the street, savouring the satisfying sense of detachment afforded by the view from the fourteenth floor of the News Ministry building. Later, when he descended to make his way back to his apartment, he would be on a par with the tram drivers and women street cleaners, but for the moment there was at least an illusion of privilege and position.

A discreet click from the door told him that the messenger had left. With a sigh, Petkov went back to his desk and lowered his bulk heavily into the uncomfortable chair. He wriggled his broad buttocks against the seat and lit a strong cigarette before hooking the ends of his wire-framed spectacles round his ears.

For a few seconds he contemplated the fat envelope lying in front of him. "I can't see that it will be much use to you," the voice had said on the phone, "but I'll send it over." Petkov had laughed, gruffly and without humour. He was accustomed to working from little or nothing. It was a challenge.

A slow dusk was drawing in the walls of the room, casting a

shadow across the desk. Petkov touched the switch of an old-fashioned desk lamp and resignedly shook his head at the resultant dim pool of light.

Slitting open the envelope with a steel paper knife, he drew out first a stiff-covered exercise book with a brown paper wrapper that was grubby and grease-stained. Inside, the pages were filled with cramped writing in a sloping, immature hand, the lines running close together as though the author had been afraid that he might fill the book before completing all that he wanted to set down. Petkov closed his eyes and recalled briefly the published pictures of the author—a sallow youth, thin of face and blank-eyed, but with a warm and generous mouth, upturned slightly at the corners.

Petkov spent some time ensuring that he could both decipher the awkward calligraphy and understand the language, before he pushed the book to one side and turned to the accompanying typed excerpts in translation which had been specially prepared. The so-called relevant passages.

He stubbed out his cigarette, lit another and began to read.

July 2nd. What a burden to be seventeen! The whole village, it seemed, was at last night's party, and everyone toasting my name. Only Maria paid me no attention, stupidly preferring to flirt with K. That oaf! I showed her how much I cared by responding to all the toasts. My friends marvelled at how much wine I drank and I dared not let them see how my head was spinning. But this morning . . . Ugh! What's more, a lecture from Mother. At seventeen, and the only man in the household, I must take more responsibility. She was very solemn and gave me Father's old rifle and told me I must learn to shoot. I asked why and she said a man must learn to be a man. When I laughed she began to cry. Kissed her and promised to practise with the gun. Later walked into the village to ask Milo if he would teach me.

No sign of Maria.

July 18th. Milo says I have my Father's eye and steady hand. He wants me to try for the prize at the Harvest Fair. Perhaps Maria, who says I shall never be a better shot than K., is in for a surprise.

August 12th. Another bad day. More and more rain. Mother fears that the crop will earn so little we shall have to sell the farm. Stayed to comfort her and missed rifle practice. Must go out twice tomorrow instead.

August 21st. Milo says I shall win easily tomorrow. I pray he

is right. K. says Maria will dance only with the winner but I haven't seen her for two days so don't know whether this is true. If I could win perhaps it would cheer Mother who is still very depressed.

August 22nd. Maria! Mária!! Maria!!! I could fill this book with that dear, sweet name. Winning the prize, hearing the cheers, seeing K. scowl—all this was nothing beside the joy of being with her tonight. We have agreed to become engaged, but first I must tell Mother and then ask Maria's father for permission. He frightens me, but for love of Maria I can do absolutely anything.

August 29th. A little weak sun today but too late. The crop is ruined. With Mother in this mood, how can I tell her about Maria and me? How much longer will Maria be patient?

September 4th. Family conference about the future. I lost my head and blurted out that Maria and I wanted to get engaged. Mother very stern, said that we were too young and anyway the farm must come first. Talk and argument late into the night after the girls had gone to bed. Mother began to cry and so did I. Why can I not be strong? At last Mother made a proposal: we should sell the farm and rent a cottage from Milo (they have obviously discussed everything behind my back). Then I should join the Army. With my keep and all my clothes provided I would be able to send home something to help support Mother and the girls, and save the rest. After a year Maria and I could get engaged—but Mother would not hear of marriage until I am twenty-one. Nearly four more years! It seems like a lifetime. But I was weary from crying and arguing and could offer no alternative. If Maria will agree, so shall I. I shall hate the Army, but what else can I do?

September 5th. Everything agreed. Even a blessing from Maria's father. I suppose I should be happy.

November 10th. Farewell Maria! Tonight we kissed each other's tears away and promised to be faithful. Tomorrow I report to the barracks.

November 14th. The Army is worse than I feared. Never any rest from shouting, polishing, drilling, drilling, drilling. Food terrible. Everyone complains. It wouldn't be so bad if I could make some friends but all my platoon are from the city. They laugh at me and call me "Country Boy." No letter yet from Maria.

November 18th. A better day. Maria writes to say that she loves me and misses me. Mother has settled down in the new cottage. Greetings from many old friends in the village. The blisters

on my feet are getting better—which is more than some of the city boys can say yet.

December 14th. At last the Country Boy has shown the city soldiers a trick. Today was the new recruits' rifle competition. Three inches of snow and bitter cold on the range. I was the winner with 180 points more than the next.

December 15th. Called before the Captain this morning and congratulated on my marksmanship. He asked if I had considered applying to join the First National Guard. I was truthful and said I had never thought I could be good enough for such a crack regiment. The Captain nevertheless promised me a transfer. What's more, I am to be given ten days' leave over the New Year!

Petkov turned a page and saw that the next entry in the translation was dated June 21st. Irritated by this gap in the narrative, he pushed the typescript to one side and picked up the diary. It was only with difficulty that he was able to follow in the original the small, slanting writing.

An account of the New Year leave—idyllic days of innocent, youthful love spent in Maria's company; occasional excursions to the inn where the writer found his military success had earned him unprecedented respect and prestige—followed by a series of entries describing in mundane detail training with the First National Guard. But through it all Petkov could detect a growing assurance which seemed to stem from the boy's realisation that his innate ability with a rifle set him above even the veterans of his new regiment. Petkov found himself smiling indulgently at the capital letters which recorded promotion to Corporal of the Guard.

After removing his spectacles to polish them with a khaki handkerchief, Petkov lit another cigarette and returned to the translation.

June 21st. Something happened today which I am almost fearful to set down even here. The Guard Major summoned me to his office. There I was left alone with a man in plain clothes whose name I was not told. After we'd discussed the Army and the Regiment, he asked questions about Mother, about Maria and about Milo. I was surprised he knew so much about the village, but he said I was not permitted to ask him questions. At last he asked if I was willing to volunteer for a special duty, even though he could not disclose what that duty was. When he saw me hesitate, the man insisted that it was a patriotic obligation to

accept. I still said nothing, simply because I didn't know what to say, but he seemed to take this for a sign of agreement. Only then did he add that if I was successful I would receive a bounty which would enable me to marry Maria, buy a farm and take Mother back to live with us. But what did he mean by *if* I was successful? And what can a mere Corporal of the Guard do to earn so much?

June 22nd. My new duties, whatever they may be, are to begin at once. I am being posted to a camp in the mountains and promoted immediately to Sergeant.

June 25th. This is no ordinary barracks. Rather is it a large house in the high pine forests. There seem to be no more than half-a-dozen of us here—a Commandant, various instructors and me, the only pupil. So I have a room of my own for the first time since joining the Army. And no tiresome duties, either. Training all day and every day, though for what purpose I know not. Map-reading (which I don't enjoy, not being very skilful) and long, happy hours with the rifle.

June 30th. An interview with the Commandant, who said a curious thing. That I should show more humility in my approach to the honourable task for which I have been chosen. When I protested that I could be neither proud nor humble without knowing what that task was, he replied mysteriously that at seventeen (nearly eighteen!) I would be the envy of men twice and three times my age and that alone should be enough to teach me humility. Later, on the range, when we were practising with moving targets I missed with only one of a hundred rounds. But the Commandant, who was looking on, said, "You will have no reason to be proud if you are as careless as that when the great day comes."

There followed a few more entries which revealed a steady intensification of training. The only personal note lamented the prospect of a long separation from the beloved Maria. Then came a sudden jump of four months.

Petkov again picked up the grease-stained book, but when he flipped through the pages to the corresponding period in the original he found a similar interval there. This time he was less disturbed. The story was already clear enough. His imagination could supply the missing information. He could guess almost to the day when practical work would have begun to be supplemented with intellectual conditioning, the lectures, the cosy chats, the gradual indoctrination. The one thing he would have liked to read—not because it would be useful but because he

had become interested in the unsophisticated personality disclosed by the diary—would have been the boy's reaction when the exact nature of his assignment was explained to him. It was by no means a simple game they'd been playing with him. Judging the moment would have needed the most delicate sensitivity. A premature move and the whole thing would have been ruined.

Impatiently, Petkov returned to the typescript.

October 9th. So far, easier than I dared believe possible. No quesions at the frontier, though my hand was shaking and I could hear my heart beating, I swear. Calmer by the time I reached here and found everything as foretold—the lodgings, the room on the third floor, the overlooking window. Surely the widow must be ours or the room would not have been so conveniently vacant. I looked hard at her but she gave no sign. How I wish there were someone to talk to.

I wish I knew if Maria would be proud of me for what I am to do.

October 10th. Twenty-four hours gone, another forty-eight to endure. It is not easy sitting here alone hour upon hour, and going downstairs to eat meals in silence has been worse. The widow places dishes on the table with a sort of unspoken hostility. I feel she knows why I am here and despises me for it. Yet she must be involved, too. Between meals I lie on my bed and stare at the ceiling. The view from the window is imprinted on my mind. I can no longer look out without imagination transforming it with the shadow of events to come.

October 11th. The longest night I have ever known. Not until dawn did I sleep and then only for an hour. When I woke my forehead was covered with sweat. At first I took it for the sign of a cold, but I know now that it was the fever of fear. Maria, if one day I have the courage to lay this book before you, know that what I must do tomorrow I could not do for pride or patriotism or duty, but only for love of you that we might at last be together for ever and ever.

October 12th. Nothing diverts my thoughts from the approaching hour, so it is best that I should exercise discipline and concentration by writing here. Discipline and concentration! The lessons of the house in the high pines! How easy and how right it all seemed there—how different now. In a few hours I must be more calm yet more alert than I have ever been in all my life.

But with every minute I grow more afraid.

Later. The time is close. The streets are filled with people, but

this window has been cleverly chosen—nothing interrupts my view for perhaps half a mile. There will be plenty of time to see him approaching, plenty of time to be ready. Half an hour ago my heart stopped when police passed along the street, calling at every house. One appeared at a window opposite and seemed to look straight into my eyes. Yet this house was passed by. Our organisation must be good if even the police have been bought. Why, then, am I not more confident, and why do my hands tremble so? If only there could be a sudden storm, anything to cause a change of plan and remove from me this terrible task. But the sky is clear and the autumn sunlight warm and bright. The circumstances could not be more perfect. If only I had the resolution.

There is a stir among the crowd below. I can hear the sound of outriders.

The typescript ended. There was one more sheet, handwritten, which said:

"Well, Petkov, what do you make of that? Have you ever known such naïvety? Myself, I find it remarkable that the boy was totally unaware we were watching him from the minute he crossed the frontier. And even more curious that though the widow made him uneasy he should think she was theirs rather than ours. However, we are fortunate he did not panic and flee. It was a great coup to take him with the rifle in his hands only seconds before the President was due to pass.

"For reasons which will be obvious, the document will not be presented when the prisoner is brought before the People's Tribunal. Similarly, as I suggested when we spoke on the phone, you will find it difficult to make direct use of this material. On the other hand, the fact that such a person should be foolish enough to keep a diary is itself evidence of the intellectual self-indulgence of our enemies. You should be able to make capital of this."

Petkov frowned. It was no business of the State Prosecutor's to teach him how to do his job. Particularly one as straightforward as this. No need even to delay preparing his first draft. The Minister would expect him to have a statement ready as soon as the judgment was delivered. Unscrewing the cap of his pen, Petkov began to write.

"The sentence of death passed by the People's Tribunal on a ruthless and dedicated assassin . . ."

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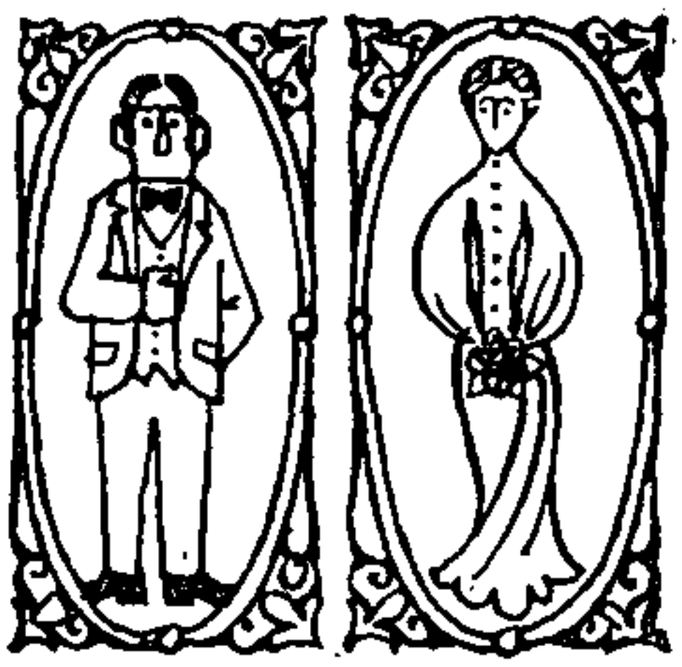


RELATIVELY SPEAKING

Fate makes our relatives, choice makes our friends.

JACQUES DELILLE, *La Pitié*

STRAINED RELATIONS

How very sweet it is to see
Our dear relations come to tea;
But sweeter far it is to know
That when they've had their tea
—they'll go!

ANONYMOUS

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

There is a certain phase in the life of the aged when the warmth of the heart seems to increase in direct proportion with the years. This is a time of life when a solicitous family does well to watch affectionately over the vagaries of its unattached relatives, particularly of those who are comfortably off.

JOHN P. MARQUAND,
The Late George Apley

Cruel children, crying babies,
All grow up as geese and gabies,
Hated as their age increases,
By their nephews and their nieces.

R. L. STEVENSON, *Good and Bad Children*

Disgraced

Timothy was obliged to admit to himself that his treatment of the Bishop lacked decorum . . . Consanguinity was to blame for it and to neutralise the poison he would try from now on to think of his parent as of any other prosy old bore who had blown in.

Unfortunately he found him in the act of pacing out the drawing-room floor. He was doing it in a purely mechanical way but his son put another interpretation on it, and all his good resolutions were immediately forgotten. "And what now, what now? What am I to put in here? A skating-rink?" he burst out wrathfully . . .

The Bishop dropped into a chair with a look of anguish. "Titi, my son, I never knew you ungenerous."

"You never knew me at all. Everything to do with my childhood is hateful to me, odious. Except for Grandmamma!"

The Bishop covered his eyes with his hand, in the attitude of prayer.

HONOR TRACY, *Men at Work*

My aunt! My poor deluded aunt!
Her hair is almost grey;
Why will she train that winter curl
In such a spring-like way?

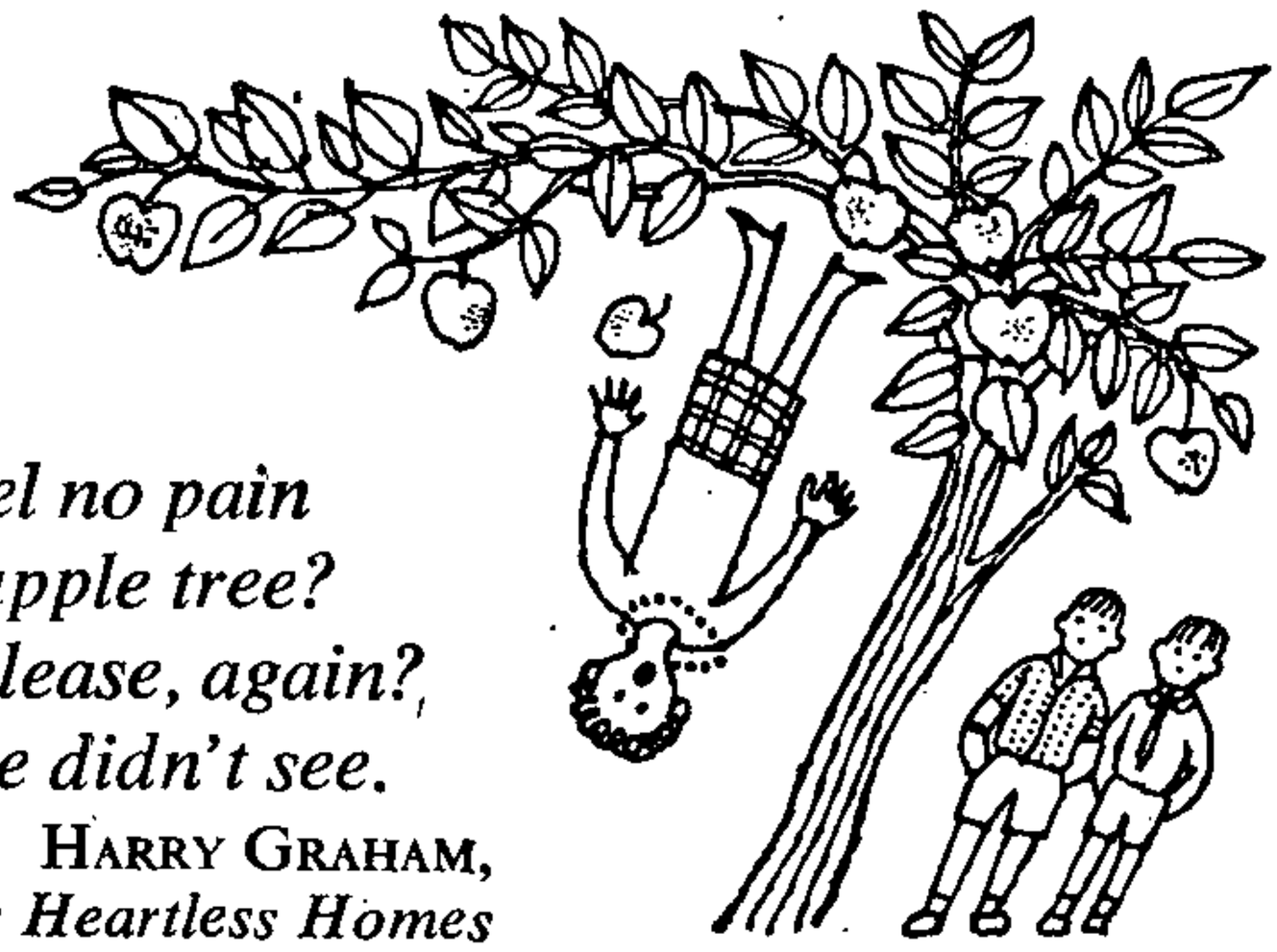
O. W. HOLMES, *My Aunt*

It is a melancholy truth that even great men have their poor relations.

CHARLES DICKENS, *Bleak House*

A poor relation is the most irrelevant thing in nature.

CHARLES LAMB, *Poor Relations*



ENCORE

Auntie, did you feel no pain
Falling from that apple tree?
Would you do it, please, again?
'Cos my friend here didn't see.

HARRY GRAHAM,
Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes

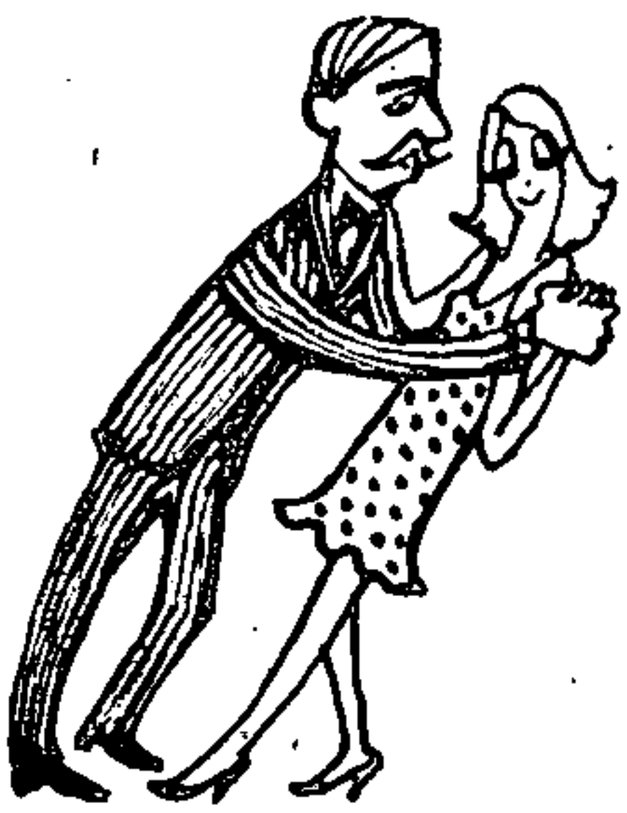
Auntie always was morose
And her views on life were bitter
For she was so adipose
No ordinary chair would fit 'er—
Now I should think that *you'd* feel glum
If you'd been born with Auntie's sitter!

ANONYMOUS, *Adipose Auntie's Pose*

CRUEL TO BE KIND

We are generally in harmony, with occasional bickerings —as it should be among near relations. Our sympathies are rather understood than expressed: and once, upon my dissembling a tone in my voice more kind than usual, my cousin burst into tears, and complained that I was altered.

CHARLES LAMB, *Mackery End*



OLD SCHOOL TIE

Uncle danced with a rather nice-looking young female he had met in the Paul Jones, but he was very depressed when he came back to the table. He said he had just found out that he was at Cranwell with her father.

DIANA CHILD, *Preliminary Canter*

A family is but too often a commonwealth of malignants.

POPE, *Thoughts on Various Subjects*

After twenty years . . . could memories reawaken those past emotions?

Never Go Back

BY VICTOR FRANCIS

HE recognised the child as soon as he saw her, although he had never set eyes on her before; indeed, he had not even known of her existence.

She was playing with a drowsy spaniel on the beach opposite the café. She would have been eight or nine years old and she wore a blue bathing suit which made her look all legs. Her hair, bobbing in two bunches, was long and dark and very straight.

It was not the hair: Sally's had been short and full of tight little curls which she used to profess to be unable to do anything with, and never needed to. It was something in the set of the child's head; something in the quick, eager, dragonfly movements of her young body which he recognised. And more than that: a feeling, deep in the core of him, which he did not care to analyse, but which instantly sensed the Sally in her.

He almost turned back then, turned back without ever really knowing, so strong was the quick reawakening of old emotions; but he had come far, he was there, he might as well stay a little longer; and he leaned against the sea wall and watched the child.

This was the first time he had been back. Since his parents had died there had been no ties of family to draw him again to the seaside town in which he had grown up. The only pull had been that of memory, of sentiment, and that had been blunted by twenty years of detached observation of war and the violent side of life as a foreign correspondent. "Never go back," was the motto he had forged in his ceaseless journey towards the star which was always over the next hill.

He would not have come back now had he not grown bored

with his brief home leave and made the mistake of wandering into the office—there seemed nowhere else to go—to see if anyone felt like a drink between editions. It was August, the "silly season", when news takes a holiday and stories have to be made. Some councillors had let off clouds of steam about somebody's proposal to employ bare-topped waitresses at a beach-side club.

"Tell you what," said the News Editor. "I'll buy you a beer if you'll nip down there and whip me up a thousand words of 'Bare Bosom Scandal Shakes Seaside'."

"Done!" he'd said, desperate to escape the homeless boredom of drifting about the city while his leave dragged by. And later, when he found that the "scandal" was in Westend, the hometown he had not seen for so long, he shrugged and thought, "So what?"

Then, when he had frothed up the story and phoned in his piece of nonsense, he made a little pilgrimage to his parents' old house. It was small, smaller than he had remembered, and the paint was too fresh, the curtains too gay. He did not go in, to hear the different voices. He turned away, a little sadly, and found that he was walking towards the beach, towards the café where he and Sally had once sat so many hours over so many long-drawn-out bottles of sweet and fizzy mineral water.

And there he saw the child, and knew she must be Sally's. Sally, whom the world had seemed too small to hold, through whom he had first sensed the vastness and excitement of the world, in her quicksilver dreams: Sally must have come back, must have married.

After a time, the child called up to the café, "Mummy! Daniel won't swim. Tell him he's got to swim."

A voice called back, "You mustn't tease the dog, darling," and he knew it was Sally's voice, and half-rose. She was standing under the awning, shielding her eyes from the sun. Then she ran down the sand. As she passed him, she glanced full in his face, and ran on to the child.

She could not have known him, not in so brief a glimpse, not after so long. And anyway, he had changed; too much he had changed in those years of wandering.

Changed? Yes, he had changed. But some part of him was still the same. It was as if the sight and the sound of her chimed within him and awoke, not echoes, but the actual feelings of long ago; a compartment of his being in which were hidden long-dormant emotions was suddenly vibrant. It was a small compartment, buried under all the changes of all the years, but it was alive. It was as though in a tiny nest, concealed in a tall tree and

invisible to the passer-by, a small warm living creature was roused from the long winter of hibernation.

As he watched Sally laughing with her chattering child, he had the strange feeling of being two men at once. He saw her with the detached, curious, unsentimental eyes of today, and, *simultaneously*, he saw her with the eyes of the boy of eighteen who had loved her with that wild and reckless intensity which comes only once and is too fierce to compromise with the demands of the possible, or to last out the patterns of life.

Both the men in him yearned to speak, but something kept him from moving until, at last, Sally left her daughter playing and turned up towards the café. He hurried behind her, alongside her, and she glanced up at him with an expressionless face. His mind was empty, but he heard himself say, "Please forgive me for staring, but I haven't seen you for twenty years."

"It's Paddy, isn't it?" she said.

"You recognised me?"

"I knew."

They walked into the café, and she said, "Would you like a—?"

"A fizz," he finished for her, and she gave herself one too and sat opposite him and said, "I often wondered if you'd come back."

"This is the first time I've been back," he said. "I couldn't resist just wandering by. I didn't expect to find you here."

"Oh, yes."

"But you went away, just before I did. You joined the girls' navy, or something."

"That's right. More than twenty years ago. That makes me . . ."

"Let's not do any sums about our ages," he said. "Did you . . . wander . . . much before you came back?"

She laughed bitterly. "I was back before the year was out and I've been here ever since. My mother was ill—"

"I'm sorry."

"—and the war was nearly over anyway. They sent me home. I looked after her till she died. Then I kept on the café; it was something to do."

"You didn't go away again?"

"Bob had been very kind. I got married."

He could not picture the man Sally would marry. "Does your husband . . . work locally?" he asked.

"He's in the police force."

"Law and order—that's good."

"He retires in four years. I don't know what I'll do with him all day then."

"Retires!"

She was defensive. "You can retire quite young from the police force these days, you know. Bob isn't that much older than me. He's very . . . kind. Dependable."

They were both embarrassed, and suddenly she rose and said, "Excuse me a minute. I must fetch Mandy."

He watched her still-slender figure moving with all the old grace down the beach and thought, "Oh, God, if it's so funny, why aren't I laughing?"

What was it she had said to him when they both were so young, and he so much in love with her, and she so much in love with life? He had begged her to marry him as soon as the Air Force accepted him and he had a little more money than a cub reporter's meagre pay.

"I won't be tied down!" she had insisted. "I won't, I won't! There's so much to see, so much to do. I want to wander, wander, wander and see it all!" Then she had teased him and added, "And when I've seen it all, and I'm tired of it all, I'll come back and you can marry me then. Except that you won't want to."

And he had pleaded with her, and got on her nerves, and she had gone out with another boy to make him mad, and they had made it up; and quarrelled again, and come together again in the passionate pattern of the young, until that last ridiculous quarrel, after which they had both gone off to don uniform and nurse their wounded prides, and solve nothing.

And he had gone on wandering, and Sally, the restless, the untameable, Sally had come home, and stayed home, and married a policeman.

He was roused from his wry reverie by her voice saying, "Mandy, this is Paddy, who Mummy used to know."

"How do you do, Mandy?" he said gravely and the little girl tugged her hair and said, "I've got a nylon nightie."

He smiled up at her mother. "You know, you're the only person who calls me Paddy. When I went away I used the full name—Patrick looks better in by-lines."

"I know," she said. "I read your articles. From all over. You've travelled a lot."

"Quite a bit."

"I always knew you were a wanderer, Paddy. You haven't changed."

"You're the one who's changed, Sally. You were the girl who'd never settle down, who wanted to see so much."

She looked hard into his eyes. "I haven't really changed, Paddy. We both wanted the same things, then. You did them. I got . . . caught. That's the only difference. I haven't changed."

"Mandy's a fine girl," he said. "Is she the only one?"

"There was another. It died."

"I'm sorry. Mandy must be a great comfort to you."

"She worships her father. I must say he's very good with her, too. It's funny, Paddy, she tells me I'm old-fashioned, square, or whatever the word is. I suppose that's because I'm her mother. But I feel, inside, just the same as I used to. I haven't really changed, Paddy. I still want the same things. And so do you. I know."

He moved abruptly.

"I'm afraid I've got to go, Sally."

"Off to foreign parts again?" Her eyes, fixed so intently on his, were giving him a message that he did not want to receive. "I bet it's somewhere interesting—you wanderer, you!"

"Well, no, actually. It's very dull." He put his hand on Mandy's head and steadied himself for the lie he must tell. "Just picking up the wife and kids and taking them off to the in-laws for a few days."

"But you're not . . .?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "I've been married for years, got a couple of fine boys. Gives a man roots, you know, after all this damn travelling about."

He looked at her face and thought, "Please, Sally, please forgive me. It's for the best, it must be for the best. Please, Sally, don't make it harder . . . Don't make me tell the lonely truth."

She was silent for long moments, and then she suddenly bent and picked up Mandy, and hugged the child to her. "Come on, Mandy," she said. "Let's say goodbye to Paddy, who Mummy used to know."

She looked up at him, looked quickly away, and added, "I'm sorry. It's Patrick now, not Paddy, isn't it? I forgot."

He said Goodbye and walked quickly away. He wanted to find a phone. He wanted to persuade the Foreign Editor to send him to Vietnam.

That's where news was being made. He'd never been to Vietnam, about time he took a look at it. Must keep moving, moving on. He travels farthest who travels alone.

He glanced over his shoulder. They were watching him. Mandy waved and, faintly, he heard Sally call out, "Goodbye, Paddy, goodbye."

© Victor Francis

GREEN-BROKE

From one of America's outstanding young writers, the story of an untamed horse, the boy who rode it, and his lonely father

STUD

BY TOM MAYER

WHEN I was a kid we done a lot of riding, but I was never as good as my old man or my brother Jack. I liked horses fine, and was all right with them, but Jack was something special and the old man was so good I don't know how to tell it.

Jack rode Roman better than most people ride setting, and four years running he was in the money calf-roping at the Rodeo de Santa Fé. And my old man, well there wasn't nothing he couldn't do with a horse if he put his mind to it. He was stunt riding at rodeos when he was eighteen, and later he was an eight-goal polo player, which is going some for a man who never heard of polo or even rode English until he was twenty-five. On weekends he used to truck a couple of ponies two hundred miles to San Patricio, and play down there with Pete Hurd and his Mexicans, and twice he was chose to play on some team against England.

In those days we had us a little spread down in the Estancia Valley, about thirty miles south of Santa Fé, and in the mornings, when it was most always cold enough so that I got goose-bumped and shivery, Jack and the old man would feed the horses. I followed them around, being careful to stay clear when Jack pitched the hay, and nobody said much and the loudest sound was the horses crunching grain.

After breakfast Jack and the old man worked them, while I watched from outside the corral. They gentled the colts, getting them used to halters and being handled, and they lunged the two-year-olds, and I remember once Jack rode a mean little bay filly.

She tried to bite him when he mounted, and he slapped her nose, and swung on, and then she begun bucking, twisting and whip-snaking and lunging and trying to get her head down. He stayed with her and I was scared for him, but then I seen he was grinning and enjoying himself. He raked her and spanked her with the reins and no mattér what she tried Jack had it figured out two jumps ahead and she couldn't shake him. She bucked until she couldn't buck no more and then she stood froze in the centre of the corral, so tired she was twitching.

Jack got off her and the old man said, "Gawdamn, son, that there's valuable horseflesh."

But Jack said, "Hell, she had it coming to her."

The old man shook his head and said, "You might've wind-broke her," but then he punched Jack on the arm and you could tell he wasn't sore and thought Jack was something special.

It used to bother me that I couldn't ride like Jack or the old man, and for a long time I thought it was because I was yellow. I worried a lot about being yellow, although Jack or the old man never ragged me none about it, but then when I was twelve my mother and the old man split and she took me with her when she moved up to Raton. At first I missed the old man and Jack and the horses crunching grain and the leather smell of the tack room, but in the Fall there was school and I made some friends and began playing football.

I played football all through junior high and high school, and senior year was all-state, so I got a scholarship to Las Cruces. In Las Cruces I separated my shoulder, and stove up three ribs in my third game, and the next year I never played. Instead I done some drinking and went down to Juarez weekends.

I was thinking about quitting school to roughneck when my mother died, and after the funeral I didn't know what to do, so I went home to the old man.

Things there was changed. The old man was older, and had less hair and a fair size pot, and couldn't ride much because of a bad hip he got off a bucking horse.

He kept eating and running a few head of Angus and teaching a riding class for rich kids in Santa Fé.

Jack was dead, neck-broke in Cheyenne by a Brahma bull named Bluetail, and you could tell the old man missed him. In the tack room Jack's gear was all laid out still, his rope coiled neat and hung from a peg and his saddle gleamy in the dark light from saddle-soaping. The old man had took to nipping Bourbon and setting around a lot, so that most of the fences needed work and there was always a few empty bottles in the trash can.

But he still kept horses, good horses, even though he didn't do much but curry and feed and look at them. One he had was a big black bastard, a green-broke stud named Aaron, that went near seventeen hands and twelve hundred pounds and was the old man's pride and joy.

If his hip wasn't bothering him the old man would lunge Aaron, but otherwise he'd just look at him in his stall, and after dinner and a few Bourbons he'd say that Aaron needed work, needed to be rode, and Gawdamn if he didn't hate having a bad hip.

I kept pretty much to myself, working some at thinking and

some at the fences, and by and large the old man and I got on fine. We ignored each other; but stayed polite.

Then one afternoon I was down cleaning out the barn, putting fresh sawdust in the stalls and flushing the water troughs, and I decided to ride Aaron. I didn't think about it much one way or the other, just looked at him standing there in his stall pawing at the side-wood, and decided I wanted to ride him.

I locked the mares in stalls away from the corral and tossed them some hay to cut down on the commotion; then haltered Aaron and put him in cross-ties. The old man had gentled him good, about as good as you could gentle a stud, and he handled fine. He tried to nip me twice, just kidding around, but he had teeth could take off your arm while he was kidding, so I slapped his jaw and said, "Hu, you son-of-a-bitch, hu."

In the cross-ties I brushed him down and saddled him. I used Jack's blanket, an old sweat-cloth and stinking Two Grey Hills Navajo that Jack had said was lucky, and Jack's saddle, and he puffed and put a hump in his back the size of a sick camel.

I yanked the cinch up tight as I could, but knew I'd have to tighten it again before I rode, then buckled the back cinch and bridled him with a gentle curb. The old man had said he'd broke him with a snaffle, but Aaron's neck looked about six feet around and I was damned if I wanted him getting his head between his knees, so I used the curb. I shoved it between his teeth and he chewed on it, making a grinding clattering sound. I left the halter on under the bridle and snapped the end of a fifty-foot-long rope to the halter ring. Then I tied the reins around his neck, put on my gloves, got the long whip off the wall, and took him out into the corral.

He led good enough but that hump was still in his back and I wondered if maybe riding him was such a bright idea. He was a lot of horse and moved easy on his feet like a big black cat. Once, he saw a sun-glint off the windmill and snapped his head up, lifting me about three feet off the ground.

When I had led him up and down a couple of times I stopped in the centre of the corral and let him have some rope. He backed off a little, head held high, white-eyed, nostrils flared; then he belted on me. I could feel the rope go tearing out through my hands and I shouted, "Hu, you bastard," and tried to snub him with the rope over my hip. He dragged me halfway across the corral but finally I got him back, and after I had cussed him I got him going round.

When lunging, a horse is supposed to trot or gently canter, but Aaron ran some and bucked more and a couple of times I

could've swore he got around the circle without his back legs touching ground once. I let him run. I didn't care about his manners, I just wanted him tired and the hump out of his back. The old man always said with a bucker you should run the living daylights out of them before you done any riding. After maybe a half-hour he was lathered and I was sweated up pretty good myself, with my hands stiff from holding the rope.

I stopped him and worked down the rope to him. He was breathing heavy, but not heaving, and tried to nip my shoulder again. I tightened the cinch, getting it up another notch easy, and led him a little more and thought, Well, what the hell.

I swung up on him and found the right stirrup with my boot toe. He stood still a second, not sure what was happening, and it was like sitting on a steam engine with a time bomb inside the boiler. I had about two seconds to set myself and squirm once into the seat and he exploded.

It wasn't what you'd call serious bucking, not the kind of mean bucking a rodeo horse or an outlaw will do; it was just high spirits, high, wide and lonesome, but it was plenty high and wide, and if I'd have had the time I'd have been so scared to death after the first jump that *rigor mortis* would have set in. He went straight up headed one way, and come straight down headed the other, stiff-legged and steep-angled and brain-shaking, and then he began crow-hopping. Not just plain side-skidding, but springing as if he had a diving board under him, and I felt like Superman on a pogo-stick. If I hadn't been licked for it twenty times as a kid, I'd 've grabbed leather for sure.

He crow-hopped right over to the side of the corral and banged off the boards, with my knee in between, and I felt something pop, but didn't have time to worry about it. Then he did a few straight jumps and throwed in a twister or two at the end before he stopped dead and turned around to look at me like he was surprised I was still there. "You moose-hung bastard," I said. He pawed with his fore-hoof and blowed air.

The corral was big, and I rode him up and down it, making him walk and trot and canter. He was smooth-gaited so that setting his trot was a pleasure, but his canter was rougher and I guessed he was so long-legged he wouldn't smooth out until he was really running. He had some idea what neck-reining was all about, and when I put him through figure eights he even changed leads for me a couple of times. The old man used to say that is something hard as hell to teach most horses, and one that does it naturally is rare.

After the figure eights I got off him and damn near fell flat on

my face, the knee hurt so bad. I had forgot all about it. First I thought maybe the cartilage was broke, but then I found I could hobble, and figured if I could walk maybe it was O.K.

I took Aaron in the barn, unsaddled him and rubbed him down, and then put him in the stall. I fed him, graining him extra, and let the mares back outside.

When I got to the house I came around to the front and found the old man setting in the living room with a shot glass and looking out of the picture window at the mountains. The picture window my mother put in, and the old man bitched at her steady for a month afterwards about cleaning it. My mother pointed out he didn't have to clean it, but then he bitched about how much it cost. In those days he had more fight.

I come in, trying not to limp, and he said, "How them horses, son?"

"Fine," I said. "I got the stalls cleaned up good."

"I appreciate that. You been a big help. I know you ain't keen on horseflesh."

"No mention."

Then he sort of drifted off and I thought maybe he had forgot I was there until he asked, "How's that stud horse? He oughta be worked more."

"He's fine," I said. "The black bastard."

"Black bastard is right. Ain't he some horse? Your brother Jack would sure a liked to rode him, I bet."

"He would've."

"Well, I appreciate it your cleaning up down there."

"No mention," I said. "Gives me something to do."

He drunk off what he had in the shot glass and poured another, and massaged at his bad hip. I stood there waiting to see if he'd say anything else, but he didn't, and I figured maybe he was thinking about Jack and didn't want to be disturbed. I wanted to say something about having rode Aaron, as I thought it would make him feel good, but I didn't know how to begin. He was always hard to talk to, and never paid no attention to me, and I didn't want him to think I was the kind of kid that ran off at the mouth.

So I kept quiet, and went into the bathroom, trying to walk even, so that he wouldn't notice the limp and ask how I got it. I ran myself a hot bath and got in. The hot water felt good on my knee. I rubbed some at the cap, and it hurt but moved all right, so I didn't think there was anything busted so that I couldn't fix it with a little liniment and tape. © Tom Mayer 1966

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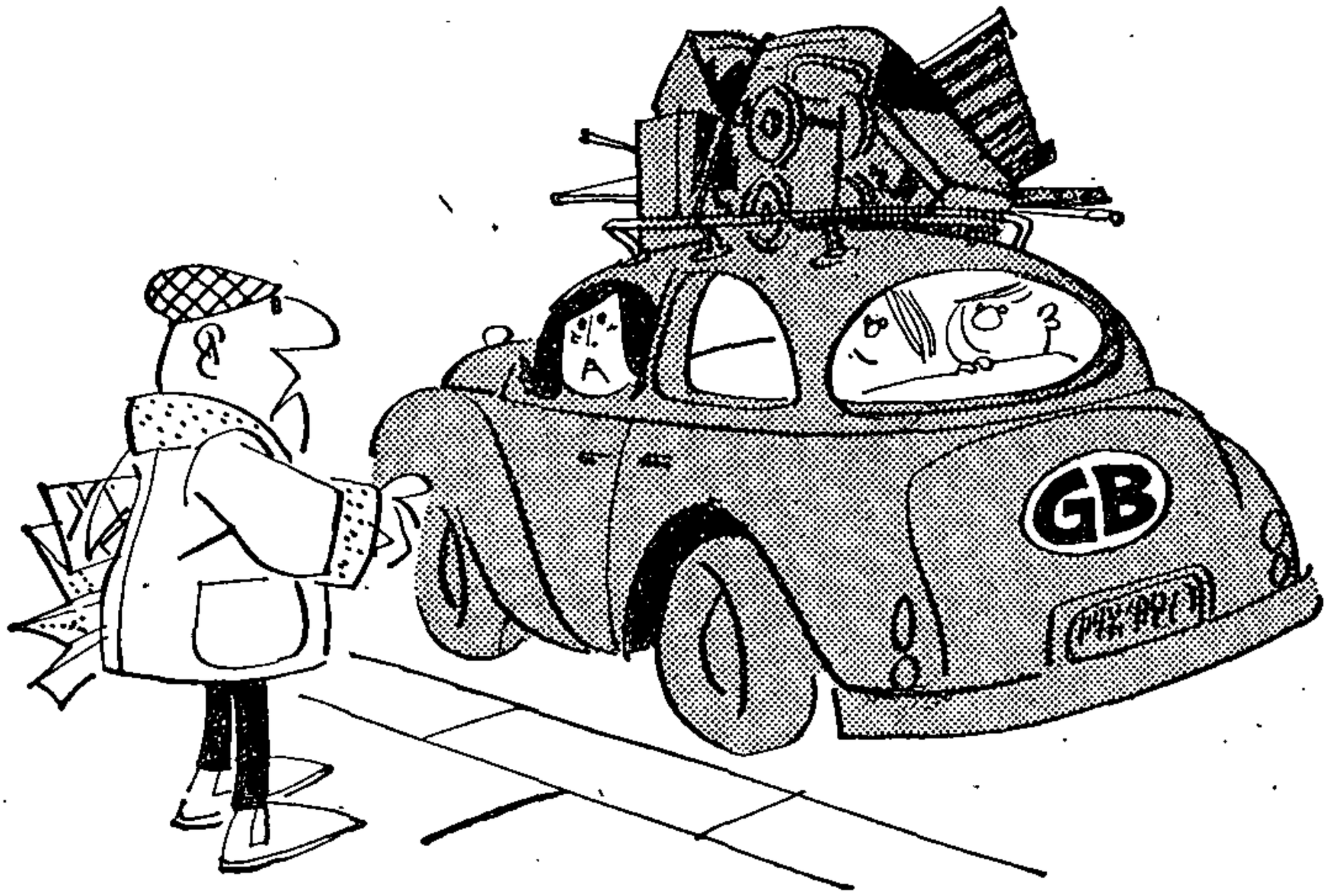
TIGHT LITTLE ISLAND TOURIST

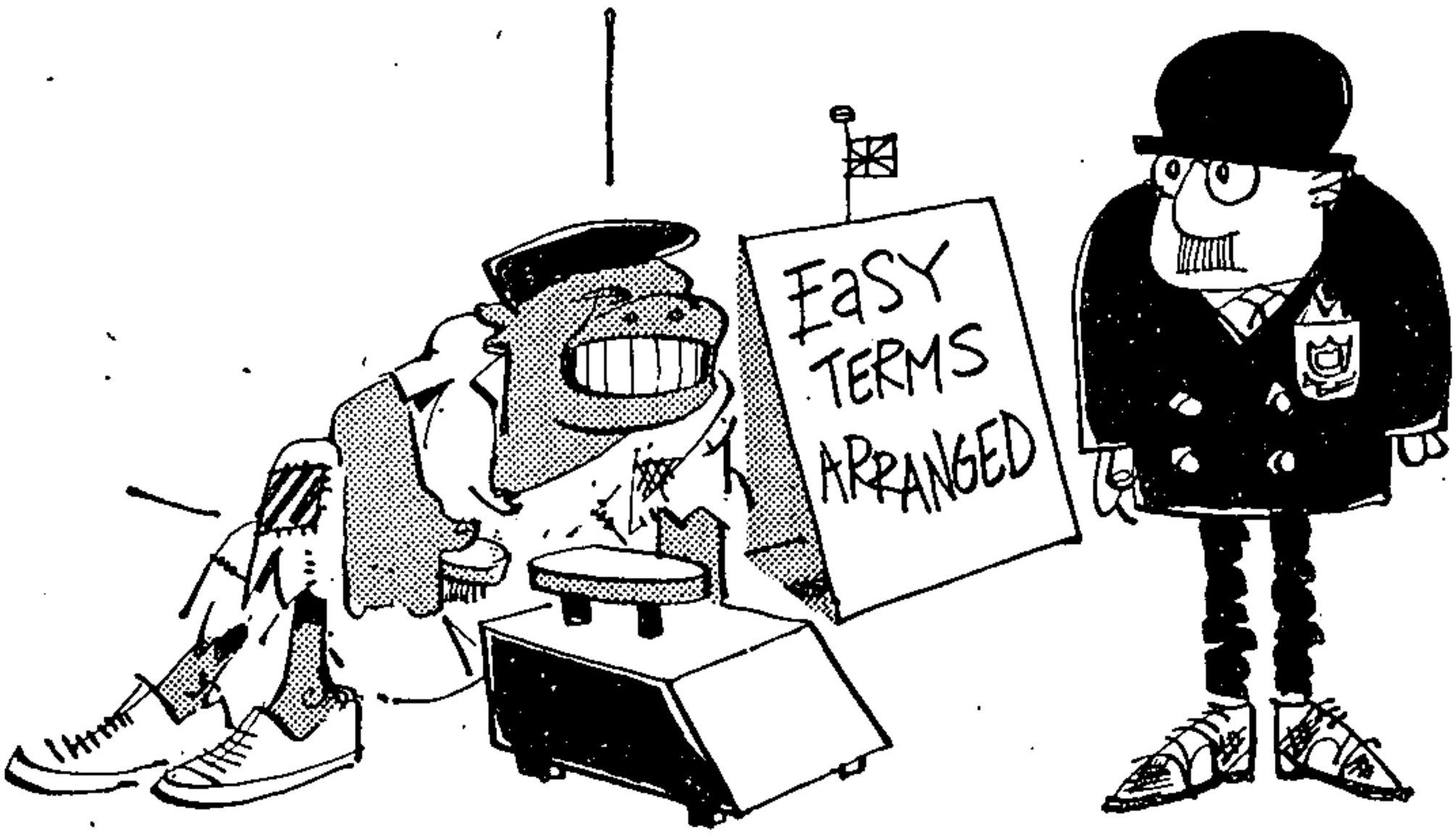
Looking ahead to holidays?
A squeeze-year preview
by Roy Dewar



"Suppose they think it means 'Gone Bankrupt'?"

"Insolent beggars—not even bothering to pester us!"

BRITISH
CATERED
FOR
Hotel
Historic
HOTEL
MIRAMAR
Splendide



"Señor, you forgot your change!"

Mary Stewart

Her life, her work, her hopes . . . The best-seller talks openly and fully to STEPHEN MERRICK

MARY STEWART, the novelist, sat on the edge of her easy chair in the way of a woman sensing danger. "I'm frightened to death," she said. "Of you." And she tried a sweet and pleading smile, as to a hesitating hangman. "Must you interview me? I'd so much rather not."

She looked at me for mercy, found none, and went on trying. "I'm just not good at being interviewed. I always seem to show my worst side. It all comes out in print as the most awful rubbish; far more dogmatic and opinionated than I'd ever intended."

She gazed at me, waiting. I was trying to decide the colour of her eyes and not succeeding. For me, and all men, women's eyes come in two colours only: blue and brown. Never mind the subtle shades, just mind the silent message: women's eyes are silent tongues and sometimes speak the plainer.

Mary Stewart's eyes, blue more than brown, spoke plainly now. They were flecked with fret and fright and shyness; and warm with wishes to be friendly and trusting. They were also puzzled and this surprised me. I knew of nothing she could be puzzled about.

"Of course I'm puzzled. It can't really be worth your while, can it? Coming all this way just to interview me."

"All this way" was London to Edinburgh, not far at all to meet the woman described by one newspaper as "one of the

most stupendously successful authors ever." And here she was, in the first five minutes, giving me the kind of clue I was after in my mission to uncover the secret of her success.

To Mary Stewart fame is as the distance to the stars: unbelievable. Her brain tells her she is famous: the rest of her cannot take it in. She feels no different, is no different. She looks in the mirror and sees the same old Mary Stewart she has always been and, I think, always will be: a woman deficient in vanity.

I suppose it does take courage to stand before a mirror and say, "I am one of the most stupendously successful authors ever" when it is so much easier to lie and say, "I've just been lucky." Not that Mary Stewart would, or could, lie. She is one of the most courageous and outspoken truth-tellers I have met, as you will see later in this article.

FAME WITHOUT VANITY

As she told me when she had got to know me a bit: "It's terribly difficult not to sound conceited because immediately you can say 'I'm a success' you are supposed to pretend to be unaware of it."

Mary Stewart could not be unaware of her success if she tried: in her ground-floor study, next to the kitchen, are gold-and-leather copies of her novels, presentation copies from her publisher. They are in fifteen languages.

She is one of the best-selling authors in the world. *This Rough Magic* had been read by four million at the last count. It was a best-seller in Britain for ten weeks and it was in America's Top Ten for forty-four weeks. This was a record.

All this could mean Mary Stewart writes rubbish, because rubbish is what most people read, listen to, or look at on TV. But the BBC's Woman's Hour, although it may broadcast rubbish now and then, does not do it nine times out of ten. And it has serialised nine of Mary Stewart's novels—some of them twice—and it will surely serialise the tenth, to be published in September.

All this fame, all this fortune, but who is Mary Stewart? She is a name on a book jacket to most of the millions who read her. Only a name. There is no photograph, taken from her best side; no potted biography, telling about her best side. The millions do not know if her hair is long; if she has children to rumple it. They do not know even if she is married or where she lives: in a whitewashed Cornish cottage or a marbled mansion with manservants.

But one thing they do know: if they met her they would like

her, as they liked her in *This Rough Magic* and *Nine Coaches Waiting* and *My Brother Michael* and all the other novels, every one, in which the heroine is of course Mary Stewart. Villain too —as we shall see.

I drove to Edinburgh, one of the millions, never having met her and knowing next to nothing about her; but liking her already for a special reason. It is impossible not to like a woman who comes on the phone like this: "Don't come up all this way just to interview me, you'd be terribly disappointed. I'm not interesting at all and I'm awful at being interviewed; I can never think of anything clever to say . . ." And I had to plead for all of five minutes before she could say, "All right then, but don't say I didn't warn you. Come any day but Monday. That's the day I get the housework and some of the washing done."

I wanted, above all, to know the secret of her success. People are not drawn to a writer by the million solely because she, or he, happens to be a good writer who can tell a good story. There is always a deeper reason: there was something about Mary Stewart which made her special.

Despite her telling me about doing the housework I still half expected to find her living in a red plush house, with mirrored rooms and red wing-chairs and scarlet silken bell-cords. The address she had given me was in the high suburbs, looking down on the city, and I drove three times up and down the road, thinking there must be two roads with the same name in Edinburgh: this one and the other one in the posh part.

This was just a nice, ordinary road with nice housewives' houses, sprouting TV aerials and narrow garages; with yo-yo husbands, nice husbands, on a string between the high suburb and jobs in the city below.

Near the corner was a house which had a little more to say for itself than the rest. Number 79, nearly hidden by trees and bushes and painted a light, bright blue. A house divided against itself, torn between the wish to stay hidden and the wish to show off. A writer's house, beyond doubt. This was it.

HEROINES ARE 'I'

I had never met Mary Stewart, in flesh or photograph, and now, deceiving myself, I tend to declare she is exactly as I imagined her. This is a lie. I never did "imagine" her; I had no mental picture of her at all. Yet when I met her there was a strong, strange feeling of recognition.

I have wondered a lot about this and can think of only one

explanation: I recognised Mary Stewart through her heroines. I saw in this woman of fifty the nine girls I had met in her nine novels. A woman old enough to be their mother. More than that: a woman who was their mother, who gave them life. No wonder I recognised her; and it was made all the easier because Mary Stewart writes always in the first person. Her heroines are "I".

These heroines are never heroic, not even beautiful. They are not ugly either. They are ordinary, like the road Mary Stewart lives in. Yet they stand out, like Mary Stewart's house; and, as I quickly found, like Mary Stewart herself. I realise now I could have got at the secret of her success through her heroines; as it was I got it from Mary Stewart, but only accidentally and after many hours.

We began, as I said, with Mary Stewart sitting as her namesake (with different spelling) must have sat one doom day in 1587. She sat with hands tightly clasping her knees, looking quite queenly too, even in tight trousers the colour of the house.

"I am just an ordinary housewife," she said, pleading not guilty. "I have a house and a husband and a garden and a cat to love and look after."

I said some right, soothing things, promising probation, and she eased back in her easy chair just an inch or so, and clasped only one knee. So Trust was born, but it was an ailing infant yet and could die at a word. It did not die. She trusted me, as she trusts practically everybody, as very honest people do. And Mary Stewart is, I think, the most honest woman I have met, with a rare type of honesty. She is honest with herself, and about herself, not merely out of conscience but because this is her nature.

HER SPECIAL TRUTHS

For example, I know of no other writer who would have the guts to say this, for publication: "I admit I want to impress you but I always feel such an idiot . . . I can never think of clever things to say. I think a writer should write and not talk. I don't talk well because afterwards I always feel I'd have liked to say it in a different way.

"Writing, I can be as slow as I like. I can make sure each word means exactly what I want it to mean and I can keep changing and changing and changing words until I get what I want."

Mary Stewart tends to talk in triplicate. "Changing and changing and changing . . ." is vintage Stewart. I suspect her talking

struggles and her writing struggles are very nearly the same. The same silences and hesitations; the same struggle for the one right word (and for the writer there is only one right word); the same false starts and crossings out; the same need for time, and more time; and, more than anything else, the same striving for perfection.

She talks slowly, often changing words, making sure each word means what she wants it to mean; full of doubts and never dogmatic; seeking always to tell her special truths. As she talked to me I knew she was thinking aloud, not minding me see the fumblings of rehearsal before the opening night. In some ways she thinks as a man thinks (or as legend says a man thinks): logical, facing facts, unsentimental, no waffle. And I suspect there is a part of her which regrets not being masculine, and despises the "weakness" of being feminine.

She said, for instance, "I'd hate my books to be thought sentimental. They are romantic—I hope in the best sense—but not soft-centred. I can't bear soft-centred books, I never read women's books. I hope all my books have a hard core of intellect in them: a real bite of intellect."

Later she said, "I like to think of myself as a romantic intellectual, with a tough kind of intelligence but romantic as well."

And still later: "All the great ideas are men's. Perhaps women haven't had long enough. But this seems true: women writers envy men writers."

She isn't beautiful. As she poured tea I tried to analyse how a woman who is not beautiful can be something better than beautiful. Taking her feature by feature, she is all wrong. But put her together again and you have, almost, original Eve. A face of harsh poetry, told in the lines of forty years, or so I thought.

"I'm fifty," she said, unique among women for at the time she was forty-nine. And I noted that her strong, passionate face was not so much the face of a strong woman as of a woman who fears to be weak. And undefended.

In every Mary Stewart novel there are times when the heroine feels herself to be not only undefended and weak, but an instant idiot too.

Says the heroine in *Wildfire At Midnight*, "I froze into complete stupidity and under his sardonic look stammered some meaningless schoolgirl rubbish . . ."

I reminded Mary Stewart, as she poured more tea, that she had greeted me much as the heroine of *Wildfire At Midnight*

would have greeted me; further, I believed that she and her heroines were one and the same.

She laughed. "Of course—though I know nothing about psychology. The only psychological term I know is 'inferiority complex' and that's only because I have one. And I have always had bouts of depression, sometimes very severe, as far back as I can remember. I am essentially a happy person, but this does happen. A ghastly black cloud comes over, quite suddenly, and lasts two or three days.

"I think of it as a 'poet's depression' and I suppose it's worth putting up with for the other extremes that the beautifully balanced people never know. I don't know what causes any particular depression. I can always think up good reasons at the time but I'm pretty sure these 'reasons' have nothing to do with it."

MY BOOKS ARE ME

This was remarkably shrewd for a woman who "knows nothing about psychology". But this is a remarkable woman. She has a very good brain—she lectured in English at Durham University; and she has this extraordinary intuition which seems to get her straight to the truth of things in psychological terms. This came out in her views on writers.

"I can't see the point of you interviewing me, or any author. The kind of person I am apart from my books doesn't matter: that's not ME. My books are me and if you want to know about me, read them. Everything's there. It is with every writer.

"I know many writers will deny this, but it must be true. You can't create a thing, anything, out of something outside yourself. The things a writer puts into his books must come from within him. They are him. The writer must give himself away in everything he writes. He cannot hide behind his characters, because each of his characters must be a part of him."

Revolutionary stuff. Not many writers would agree; indeed at the moment I can think of only one. Me. All the writers I know would cry "rubbish" and dismiss it to the dust-cart, Mary Stewart with it.

They would be wrong. Mary Stewart was not only right, in my view, but she went on being right . . .

"It makes me so cross when people try to separate the man from his work. We've seen quite a lot of it recently. You know the kind of thing: Somerset Maugham wrote brilliant novels but in real life he was this, that or something else.

"This is plain nonsense. The people who knew Maugham

never knew the whole man, only a bit of him. The whole man was in his novels; it is by these we must judge him."

Mary Stewart had never heard of the psychological theory I told her about—that the writer, any artist, is one who feels himself to be all in bits, good bits and bad bits, and to make himself whole, to rescue himself, he tries to fit all the bits together. If he succeeds, then he has managed to turn the bad bits into good bits and the whole lot are united—in his work of art.

And if all this seems far-fetched, then try reciting Humpty Dumpty, or remember the last time you said, "I've gone all to pieces, I must pull myself together."

"That makes real sense," she said. " 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' I know my Bible; I'm a parson's daughter. I don't believe all I've read in the Bible, but I believe that. We demonstrate the truth of it every time we say, 'I like Shakespeare'—or Beethoven or Hemingway. A Beethoven symphony is the total Beethoven; the fact that he ill-treated his son—or was it his nephew?—is only a bit of Beethoven . . ."

She stopped, looked at me half sideways. "Does this sound the most awful nonsense? I always feel such an idiot, rushing into things without first thoroughly thinking them through. That's the terrible thing about this interview. I keep wondering what you think of me. I'd much rather hear about you."

I said it wasn't nonsense at all; it was original thinking and it made brilliant sense; and she had taken the words right out of my mouth. She seemed reassured.

A MIRROR OF HERSELF

"Looking back over my earlier novels, I'm sure every writer really does give himself away. I can see how I gave myself away hand-over-fist. I take it for granted now that I'm bound to give myself away every time I write."

I asked her for examples of giving herself away, getting down to brass tacks, and she hesitated, then said she couldn't remember any straight off. And looked utterly wretched.

"It's funny, I really can't tell lies," she said, brightening up. "I try, then I give myself away, if not straight away then a couple of days later. Or I confess. But I can tell social lies as well as anyone, like: 'You look pretty in that hat' when she actually looks awful, but that's different, don't you think?"

I said yes, it was different all right, but now what about those examples of giving herself away! She smiled, a genuine smile, free from hate, and said she would tell me if I promised not to tell anyone else (of course she freed me from my promise later).

"I don't want any of this published—it makes me sound so silly. Well, here's one example. All my heroines are chaste. I believe the basic set of values of any hero or heroine are always the writer's own, though he may not know it. I happen to believe in personal chastity, but saying so makes me sound a prig and I don't think I really am a prig. I think people may do as they like so long as they hurt nobody else, and that, as a matter of fact, keeps you on a pretty straight line. I'm a great believer in people minding their own business."

If Mary Stewart gives herself away in her heroines, she must also give herself away in her villains. It is not only the hero or heroine who represents a part of the author; every one of his characters, created by him, must be a part of him.

The chaste Camilla in *My Brother Michael* stands for Mary Stewart, but so does the unchaste Danielle. She stands for a part which is much more hidden, a part which Mary Stewart is almost certainly unaware of. It might even be that a Mary Stewart novel represents, among many other things, an inner struggle between chastity and inchastity; and that her novels are guardians of chastity, because the chaste heroine always wins.

This sort of struggle is of course true for every writer, every painter—every artist who works from within himself. We are all desperate to neutralise what we feel is bad and dangerous in us, struggling always to civilise the primitive.

A WRITER HAS NO DUTY

We talked on and on and Mary Stewart poured the last of the hot water into the teapot and, outside, Edinburgh was grey.

"People ask me so many personal things: what my hobbies are, what I like to eat. And everyone asks me how I work—but why do they want to know? It doesn't interest me one bit whether another writer scribbles with a pencil, types or dictates to a secretary."

I ignored this and asked her what she likes to eat and what her hobbies were and whether she writes with a typewriter or a pencil, and anything else of interest since the day she was born.

"I'm fifty. My father is eighty. He is a parson, the Reverend Frederick Rainbow. He has all my novels, and likes them, but I haven't discussed them with him in detail.

"To tell the truth I don't like doing this with anyone. I never think about my readers anyway. They don't come into my work. I don't think a writer has any duty—to instruct, or to improve, or entertain. When you start tailoring your writing to please your readers, you've had it.

"I try simply to satisfy myself and I have to go on and on and on trying, though I never satisfy myself wholly. I accept, of course, that the writer is the worst judge of his work, at least until some time after.

"I don't write easily. My work only flows after I've been hammering at it for ages and ages and ages. It's like pushing a rusty machine up a hill. I do three complete drafts for each novel and I never know how long it's going to take me to finish it. It took me ten months to write *Wildfire At Midnight* and two years to write *The Ivy Tree*.

"I try to work a regular stint each day. Six hours. It isn't always easy because, after all, I am a housewife, with a husband to look after and a house to run. I'd actually work best in the morning, but there's too much to do about the house.

"Always when I'm in the middle of a new book I think it's rubbish. It is never as I planned it or as good as I'd hoped it would be.

"Getting started each day is the worst part. I sometimes sit for half an hour before a blank page, longing to get up, but if I write something, however rubbishy, that gets the wheels turning and I can go on. And next day it's always better than I'd thought.

"Or if I hammer at it and hammer at it and hammer at it, then put it to one side, do some gardening, or read a bit, or go to bed; then, when I come back to look at this dreadful jigsaw of words and ideas, I find I can put it into shape just like that.

"Sometimes I think I've written something brilliantly, and that's fatal. I tend to fall in love with a phrase and I'll spend a couple of days over one paragraph, trying to work the phrase in. These are the phrases I'm ashamed of two years later.

"Some of them are probably good, if they were not in a laboured setting. Good writing should be unobtrusive and the reader shouldn't ever have to stop and think, 'That's a fine phrase.' The good writer curbs his natural impulse to show off. He has to get through with a whang to his reader's heart, without the reader even noticing how he's done it.

"The hardest part of writing for me is dialogue. Quite often I miss it out in the first draft, just filling the gaps with 'Here people talk a bit'. I do dialogue over and over and over again, then read it aloud as though it were a play, actually acting it. So often I find I have used 'written' dialogue, not the things people actually say.

"I suppose I love writing and hate writing. Like every writer. You always hope the agony of getting through the difficult bits

will grow easier as the years go by, but it's just the same except that you've learned from experience the thing will come out if you stick at it."

Almost as an afterthought Mary Stewart added something which interested me very much: it brought me nearer to the thing I was seeking—the secret of her success.

She said, "It's like having a baby. In fact, a book is very much like a child when it's finished."

Here I asked my first real question. If she suffers, writing, why does she write? She was silent a moment, thinking; then: "It would do me a lot of good to think about the faults in my books. Let's talk about them.

"*Thunder On The Right* is a very bad book. I'm bitterly ashamed of it. This was my second novel. With the first, *Madam, Will You Talk?* I'd discovered the intense joy of creating a complete and rounded autonomous world, a world I could walk into any time I liked. Then, with *Thunder On The Right*, I was writing for writing's sake. Purple patches all over the place.

"One of the critics, the one I most admire, jumped on me with both feet and I was very hurt; one always is; but I knew he was right, and in my next novel, *Nine Coaches Waiting*, I wrote as plainly as I could.

"If I wanted to say, 'They went down the hill . . .' I said, 'They went down the hill . . .' I don't think I wrote too plainly; I'd like to be a good bit barer in style than I am. But it was a valuable experience. It taught me a lot about pace and the over-use of 'poetic' words."

THE URGE TO GO ON

I thought it time to ask again the question she had ignored. Why do you write? The question no writer can ever answer, though he may think he can.

"That's dead simple—because I have to."

I asked why she had to.

"Because I'm not happy if I'm not writing. Really, it's as simple as that."

But it wasn't simple and Mary Stewart knew it. She tried again.

"All the clichés about writing have been used and used and used until they seem meaningless. I have the creative temperament. I am restless, unfulfilled and unhappy if I'm not doing or making something. I have tried every conceivable way of making things: I make gardens, I turn houses into homes, anything you like. I have a very strong nesting instinct."

She paused, looked at me, and I looked straight back, saying nothing.

"I suppose I'm not answering you at all, am I? Shall we say this just happens to be my thing? The only excuse for being alive . . . no, that's badly put. I mean, the reason we are alive is to make a difference in the world. I was going to say—add to the sum total of Creation, but that's too grand.

"I told you about discovering the intense joy of creating in writing. The point at which I finish a novel is exactly the point at which I want to go on; to write another scene and stay with the characters I've grown to know so well. I can well understand why some novelists write novel after novel about the same character: Maigret, Marlowe, Sherlock Holmes.

"This still doesn't explain why I need to write, does it?"

It didn't, and I gave up for the moment and I asked her instead if she knew what was the secret of her enormous popularity.

"What can I say? It's just happened that I'm writing about things at a time when people want to read about them. In that I've been lucky. I can see that doesn't satisfy you—well, I write stories and there's been an instinctive human desire for stories right from the Stone Age. Perhaps my stories are well written, or at least easy to read. I'm not a major writer, am I?

"But perhaps there is something in my books which meets the need of an awful lot of people just now. I can only call it poetry. I was a poet, you see, and I've found the same satisfaction in novels. Creating a picture; creating a bright world people can go into. I don't mean an escapist world, though of course all my books are escapist, as every novel should be.

"Does this answer your question?"

It did not, any more than she had answered the question: why do you write? I did not press her. The answers to both my questions would come.

THE TARGET: PERFECTION

Mary Stewart wrote her first four novels in longhand, in ink, on both sides of lined foolscap paper; and she wrote each three times. She let me see the first draft of *Wildfire At Midnight* while she went off to do some telephoning.

A pile of faded foolscap nearly two inches thick. The writing was small and sloped slightly right. Each word was written in full, with none of the abbreviations all journalists and some authors use to ease the labour: t for the; ty for they; w for with; wh for which. Mary Stewart hd nvr evn hrd o tm.

Every true writer, reading the first rough page of *Wildfire At Midnight*, would smile and be touched, seeing himself. It had all the signs of excitement, and eagerness, that every writer knows at the first page, before the suffering begins. There was the joy in starting, and the joy in putting off the moment of starting by means of tricks all writers get up to, and feel guilty about, and swear to abandon, but never do. They were the tricks Mary Stewart got up to, as she lingered rather long . . .

In brackets were the words "First draft". Nearby was "Average 300 words per page" and "circa 55,000 words" with the 55,000 crossed through and 65,000 substituted.

Centred at the top of the page: "By Elizabeth Haywood". It may have been "Hayward" but it was hard to tell: the name had been heavily crossed through and "by Mary Stewart" written above. Below all this was "Author of 'Madam, Will You Talk?' and 'Death On the Bare Mountain' ", but what Mary Stewart meant by this I do not know; its oddness did not strike me till later.

She had at that time written three books: *Madam, Will You Talk?*, *Thunder On The Right* and *Nine Coaches Waiting*. She had not written a book called "Death on the Bare Mountain". This, however, was the provisional title for a book she did write, *Wildfire At Midnight*, the one I was now studying. She was claiming, in effect, to be the author of a book she was only beginning: a perfect example, I would think, of the kind of wishful-thinking we writers are subject to.

In this first draft Mary Stewart crosses out whole sentences, whole paragraphs, whole pages. There seem to be more words crossed out than words left in. All the time she is writing and rewriting: struggling to get as near as possible to the impossible: Perfection.

The first sentence on this first page is a perfect Mary Stewart opening. "Nothing could have looked more peaceful." We addicts give our knowing nods; if it looked peaceful then, sure enough, it would be seething underneath with mystery and murder.

All the same, Mary Stewart had crossed out this first sentence and written instead: "In the first place, I suppose, it was my parents' fault for giving me a silly name like Gianette".

This is clever too and we addicts give more knowing nods and then ask the key question: *What* was her parents' fault? Again, we know the answer. Gianette is going to be chased and lost and chased again all round a dark, bare mountain, thick with mist and weirdness; she is going to be nearly murdered;

she is going to be saved by the hero as all Mary Stewart's heroines must be saved if she is to go on writing; because, writing always in the first person, she has to be her own heroine.

It is said that the writers who have to struggle hardest to write are the easiest to read, because theirs is the best writing. I could test this now with Mary Stewart, who is very easy to read. Here, for example, is the exact reproduction of her first-draft struggles to deal with the heroine finding out about her husband's infidelity:—

"I was not surprised [crossed out] . . . I felt no surprise. We were divorced in 1949, to the great dis . . . and I went . . . For the sake of my parents . . . We were divorced in 1949 to the great distress of my father . . . my parents . . . my father . . ." [The whole of this passage is crossed through and the struggle goes on.] "By 1949 it became impossible even for the sake of my parents to stave off the inevitable and, and so, when Nicholas asked me to divorce him, I did so . . ." [This won't do either. Mary Stewart kills it all and then comes the final version, as published.] "We were divorced in 1949. For the sake of my mother, who is so High Church as to be verging (according to Father) on Popish Practices, I kept Nicholas's name and I still wore my wedding ring. . ."

Some Mary Stewart fans may ask why she could not have written her final version straight away, instead of having to sweat through the false starts. The only answer is another question: Why did not the Wright Brothers build the VC10?

I went through page after page of this first draft, hoping Mary Stewart's phone call would go on, but it finished and she came back and I was, after all, glad to see her back. I asked how long this great labour had taken.

"Ten months, my quickest. But I type the first draft now, on a new electric typewriter which is absolute bliss, though it petrified me when I first had it. It hummed at me and I had to switch it off each time I wanted to think of a new sentence. I'd started to learn to type during my first novel, Chapter Four.

"Sometimes I get really excited writing. I write faster and faster until I find my hands shaking. When I'm nervous my fingers get pins and needles. Do yours?"

I explained that for me it was the other way round. I got the pins and needles, then got nervous, thinking it was thrombosis or angina or something. I explained this in full because Mary Stewart, I discovered, did not ask questions out of politeness. She wanted answers. She also wanted my opinions, and she

listened to them, never interrupting; indeed, she is one of the very few people I have met whose mouths are not so full of words that they have lost the gift of silence—and good manners. People chatter, after all, because they fear to be alone; because alone, they are lonely.

Mary Stewart would rather be alone.

'DEAR MARY S., I THINK YOU'RE FAB'

"I'm a solitary beast by nature. I always was, even as a child. I enjoy people, but it depends on what I'm doing. I mean I don't mind being alone for hours and hours and hours, and I need a good deal of solitude each day or I'd go mad.

"I enjoy going out to see people, having people in to meals I've cooked for them, and all this sort of thing . . . I don't know . . . I like the best of both worlds. Most writers tend to be solitary people and I suppose I am more solitary than anything else.

"Probably my happiest times are when I am entirely alone and getting on with the job and it's going well.

"I like going away alone, too. I think you see more, you're open to more; you live at your own tempo. With other people, I tend to worry if they're getting bored. Actually, I think I worry too much about other people's feelings. I usually find out afterwards they never needed worrying about.

"I know everyone has the idea I go racketing about the world for background for my novels. It isn't true. I rarely go for more than a fortnight's holiday. *My Brother Michael* is based on a holiday in Greece. I didn't take any notes—I never do. I only ever note what time it gets dark.

"Quite often I take my trips abroad when my husband (Professor F. H. Stewart, Regius Professor of Geology at Edinburgh) is busy at the University, and then I sometimes go with friends, sometimes alone. Yes, I enjoy being alone—except in the evenings, when you want someone to exchange the day with. This is one of the nice things about being married.

"Sometimes I am recognised and I love it and hate it. I hate publicity, but love it when people know my name and say 'Aren't you the author?' or when some teenager writes 'Dear Mary S., I think you're fab.' This feeds my vanity and is a very necessary food. It restores my self-confidence which, as you know, we writers haven't got much of.

"What I hate about modern publicity is the notion that if you are good at your particular trade—and my trade is writing—then you must be Sir Oracle on everything else; and you find

yourself on television being asked your opinion on things you know nothing whatever about.

"I had my eyes really opened about television only recently. I appeared on one of those opinion panels which was recorded; then I watched it when it was broadcast—and I watched myself very closely.

"There was one point where someone was holding forth and I was listening, and looking very intelligent and interested, but I knew exactly what I was really thinking: Why don't you shut up and let me talk a bit? I felt a bit more humble after that."

I butted in at this point to object to Mary Stewart's calling writing a "trade". This is the fashionable thing among many journalists and authors nowadays, and to me it is inverted snobbery. Writing is not a trade, it is an art, or a profession. I argued this with Mary Stewart, but she stuck to it that writing is a trade and I stayed shocked. Then we came to money, which she didn't want to talk about.

"I'm not pretending I don't care about money, but I don't see the point in making a fortune, quite honestly. This may sound silly, but to me money isn't interesting in itself. The whole point of having it is in not having to think about it.

"I earn a fair amount, but you know how colossal taxes are. This used to worry me, because a writer's life is not a secure one; when you are on the crest of the wave there is nowhere to go but down, and it would be nice to salt away some of what I earn against bad times, if they came. It's impossible.

"I'm not grumbling. I do extremely well and I am not really afraid of drying up, or becoming unpopular. I hope my children —my books—will look after me in my old age."

A QUESTION OF ENERGIES

This brought me to something else Mary Stewart didn't want to talk about, but I pressed her, having guessed pretty well what it was. At last she consented to talk about it.

"Of course I wanted children. I married at twenty-eight and planned to have four—you know how cheerfully one does. Two years later I lost our first baby and the doctors said I could never have another.

"It was a very, very, very long time before I could believe the doctors. You know how women are . . . we just hope the doctors are wrong, and I went on hoping for years and years and years.

"My eldest boy would be eighteen now. If I'd had four children, even three, I doubt if I would have written any books. I don't mean the creative urge would have gone; it would have

been a question of energies. I'd have put that part of myself into them that I now put into writing.

"All this isn't quite the same as saying my books now stand for the children I couldn't have. I'm too close to be able to judge. And when you ask me: Why do you write? I wouldn't feel honest saying: Because I wanted children. I feel it's a little more complex than that and anyhow, it would sound rather soft, and I'm not soft."

This was the second time in this long Edinburgh afternoon that Mary Stewart had defended herself against charges of being soft which, so far as I know, have never been made. Significant, perhaps.

She went on: "You wanted to know the reason for my success. Well, I had a letter the other day from a reader, a woman who'd been having a bad time mentally. She said I sounded nice and sympathetic and pleasant, through my books that is, and above all she liked to read my books because they made her feel *safe*.

"Words like nice, moral, truthful, sympathetic—all pleasant words, but made to sound insipid now. And safe! Readers writing to me tend to use these words, and I'm not sure I like it. As I said, I want credit for the hard core of intellect I believe is in my books."

And now I asked Mary Stewart my last question: Why, in almost every one of her novels, does the heroine meet a young boy who needs her protection and help? And mothering. David, for example, who appears in her first book of all, *Madam, Will Yóu Talk?*

"I have never really wondered why," she said, but knowing at once what I was getting at. And she added, trying to help, "David was to have been my first son's name."

This was it. Two questions: What makes you write? Why are you so successful? One answer, but it answered both.

Mary Stewart can have credit for the "hard core" of intellect. It is there, right enough; she is a brilliant woman. But this is not why millions read her.

Why then? Her books stand, at least in part, for the children she could not have; and they are loved because they stand, again in part, for something that is nice, moral, truthful, sympathetic, safe—soft! Something millions have made insipid, but these same millions yearn for.

They stand for the bedtime story and the soft heart of mothering. They stand for Mary Stewart.

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TWO-MINUTE TALE

THE KIND-HEARTED WAITER

BY GEOFFREY EYRE

HERE she comes, poor old soul," said the headwaiter. "I'll sit her down on table fourteen so she gets the heat from the big radiator. Bring some nice hot rolls from the kitchen; she looks frozen, poor soul."

Into the dining room came a little old lady in a shabby rain-coat, her nose watering with cold. She walked with the frail movements of extreme old age and took a long time to get settled down in her chair. Searching for her glasses and peering short-sightedly at the menu took even longer, but the headwaiter never made any attempt to hurry her.

"I don't know why he bothers," Raoul the station-waiter said to Léon the assistant chef. The evening had only just begun and as yet there were few customers for them to serve.

Léon replied, "Perhaps he was unkind to his granny or something and is trying to make up for it."

"Maybe she is loaded and wants someone to leave it to."

"No, she must be poor, I think. She always adds the bill about ten times and only orders the cheapest food on the menu."

Raoul said, "Only yesterday he turned away a party of four businessmen because one of them was wearing brown shoes with a navy blue suit. That's how fussy he is who eats in here. So why does he bother with this scruffy old lady?"

"Throw her out, too," Léon agreed. "If she can't afford to pay for her dinner she can't leave much tips for hard-up waiters."

"Damn right," Raoul said.

But the headwaiter took no notice and always gave her the best of everything without putting it on the bill. Once he brought

her a carafe of wine and on another occasion served her a portion of *canneton à l'orange* when she had ordered lamb cutlets.

"I don't go to church," he explained, "I don't belong to any charitable organisations. I don't spend my spare time reading to blind people or visiting the sick, I don't even send a donation to Oxfam instead of sending Christmas cards; in fact I don't do either. The only good works I do in the world is lushing this old party up with some decent food once in a while. It makes me feel warm inside. Makes me feel I am helping to relieve some of the suffering and unhappiness in the world."

"And it doesn't cost him a penny," Raoul the station-waiter said to Léon the assistant chef.

Not long after this the hotel changed hands and one day the new proprietor sent for the headwaiter.

He said, "As a matter of principle I never interfere in the running of departments. I wouldn't dream of setting foot in the kitchen and criticising the chef, and under normal circumstances I would be quite happy to leave the restaurant entirely to the headwaiter. However—" Here he paused to blow his nose. He sniffed a few times and went on, "However, it so happens that my mother occasionally dines in this hotel and she informs me that the dining room staff, and in particular yourself, are disgracefully slack. For instance, last Sunday week she ordered lamb cutlets and peas and received instead a portion of roast duck and several vegetables. These instances can be multiplied over a period of nearly two years, in fact from the time when you were appointed as headwaiter. I am sure you will appreciate that one mistake can be overlooked, but a series of mistakes over a long period of time is another matter. There is also the possibility that every customer has been similarly undercharged in which case you would have lost the hotel a considerable sum of money. Do you agree?"

"It is a reasonable conclusion," the headwaiter said.

"I'm sorry and all that, but the only explanation that occurs to me is gross carelessness in making out the bills. My mother says she has always had more food than she paid for, even free glasses of wine, and on one occasion a starter course of smoked salmon that she did not want but ate, because she is of a shy nature and did not want to make a fuss. She insists that you be replaced by a more competent person, and since she has a considerable financial interest in the hotel I am bound to take notice of what she says. You appreciate my position, I am sure."

"Only too well," said the headwaiter. "Alas, only too well."

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She did everything for her menfolk that a woman can do, but everything can be too much

BROTHERS IN ARMS

by Ronald Jeans

AFTER the funeral they drove back to the house in Campden Hill in the large new 1955 Humber saloon, driven by the chauffeur who had served the deceased faithfully for twenty years. There were four of them: Eleanor (the widow), Anthony (the only surviving brother), Eleanor's sister Lily, and her husband, who had come all the way from Maidstone; so Eleanor insisted on their coming back for a cup of tea.

There were no other close relatives at the service; the other mourners had been friends or business associates, and the staff of the firm of John and Anthony Cross.

As the car made its chequered way through Bayswater there was a little desultory conversation. As usual after a funeral, relief from strain showed itself in the exchange of platitudes about the unseasonable weather, and the increasing volume of traffic. It was agreeable to know that the world went on.

Anthony, however, was silent. His elder brother's death had not been unexpected; he had been ailing for some years, and after all he was seventy-five—he had, in fact, died on his seventy-fifth birthday—but the fact somehow seemed to bring death nearer to Anthony. He himself was only sixty-five; they had been the eldest and the youngest of a family of five, and the intervening members had long since died. Perhaps because of this, or perhaps because of their long partnership in business, Anthony had felt himself closer to John than to any of the others. He would miss John.

Anthony, a confirmed bachelor, though never posing as celibate, had dined regularly at the Campden Hill house where

John, settled down for good with Eleanor, loved to display the solid comforts and excellent meals she provided. "No man ever had a better wife," he would say proudly.

In Anthony's view she was too good. Her devotion to John was her life's work; she anticipated his every need, from choosing his underclothing to changing his library books. John was the good-natured type, and had never realised the extent to which he had abrogated the running of his personal life. Anthony had made an occasional attempt, in a light-hearted way, to bring it home to him, but John was apt to take such criticism as an aspersion on Eleanor. So Anthony gave up trying, and as the years passed John had become more and more dependent on Eleanor.

As he looked at her, leaning back in the corner of the Humber, he had no doubt that her sad sense of loss was lightened by the thought that she had done everything that a woman could do for her husband in his lifetime—except, thought Anthony, allow him to live. Her face wore the expression of a craftsman who had finished a long and laborious job to his satisfaction.

And pondering this, Anthony wondered what she would do with herself now that her work was so satisfactorily complete. That she herself was aware of the blank future that lay ahead became evident later in the day, when she and Anthony were alone together in the quiet house.

"You won't go back to your flat tonight, will you?"

Anthony, who had moved in when John's condition had become hopeless, said of course he wouldn't. He'd thought of staying on a few days to help her clear up John's papers. Eleanor was plainly grateful, and went off to see about dinner; which in due course appeared, served immaculately by a parlourmaid she had retained in her service for ten years.

Next morning on the breakfast table—Eleanor breakfasted in her room—he found a note which read, "Shall assume you will be in to dinner unless you tell Cartright to the contrary." He didn't tell Cartright to the contrary, but noticed with appreciation that she had remembered to leave a raw apple.

It took more than a week to go through John's personal belongings. Towards the end of that time, as they were sitting together after dinner, Eleanor said, "I want to ask your advice, Anthony. It's about this house."

"What about it?"

"I think I shall sell it. It's much too large for me now that I shall be by myself, and I understand that houses around here are fetching very high prices."

"That's true enough," he said. "But where would you live?"

"I should find a nice little flat somewhere."

"I don't think you'd like that."

"I should get used to it, I expect. Frankly I feel it's wrong, with all the homeless people one reads about, to keep a big house like this, and a staff to run it, all for one person. Unless of course . . ."

"Unless what . . .?"

"I suppose you wouldn't consider moving in here?"

"I hadn't thought of it."

"You could have the second floor to yourself. I could easily turn the small bedroom into a little sitting-room you could use when you wanted to be alone. And you'd have your own bathroom. It would be like a little suite." So she had been working it all out with her usual precision and efficiency.

"It sounds very nice indeed," he said, guardedly, "but it needs a little thinking over."

"Oh, my dear, I wouldn't expect you to make up your mind *without* thinking it over. That's why I mentioned it now. Naturally, I shouldn't put the house in the hands of an agent until you had. But they do say spring is the best time to sell a house if you must."

By this time Anthony felt that the only thing he could do was to go to bed. As he rose, Eleanor said, "You'd be saving the rent on that service flat of yours. I shouldn't expect you to pay rent here, of course."

"Oh, nonsense. I couldn't agree to that."

"Well, we could work out some arrangement to cover everything, staff and all, if you'd feel happier that way."

"I should. Goodnight," he said.

"Goodnight." And then, as he went out of the room she added, "It would certainly be a pity to lose the staff."

The next day Anthony moved back to his flat to think over Eleanor's suggestion, though he knew in his heart that the decision was never in doubt. Now that she had asked him to join her he felt that he couldn't, for John's sake, leave her alone in that big house, or in some impersonal flat she might take. Before the week was out he rang up and accepted the offer.

So the second floor was converted into Eleanor's idea of a bachelor flat. As she proudly showed it to him she said, "I don't suppose you'll be having women up here?"

Anthony said he thought it was improbable, and reminded her of his age.

"It's not that *I* mind," she said. "I'm thinking of Cartright."

Before he had been an inmate very long he was to discover that Eleanor was always thinking of Cartright. Not only of Cartright, but of Mrs. Bowden, the cook, and Harkness, the chauffeur. He learned that any suggestion of criticism was likely to offend, and might lead to their giving notice. Eleanor was convinced that if one went, the other two would follow. For years she had been treading the tightrope of diplomacy to avert such a catastrophe. John, she said, had been a great help; she had trained him never to make a complaint directly to any of the servants, but to bring it to her, and allow her to deal with it in her own time and in her own way. She hoped Anthony would try to do the same.

This was his first inkling that the halter of servitude, which he had so criticised in his brother, was being gently slipped over his head. Well, he thought, at least I know what is happening, which John never did, and I must show her that I'm not the easy victim that he was.

His first test came when, one fine spring Saturday, they decided to drive down to Haslemere to see some old friends of Eleanor's. Anthony, who had sold his own car as redundant, suggested that he would like to drive the Humber himself; he had never driven it, he said, and would like to get the feel of it.

"Of course you may drive it," said Eleanor, "but we'll have to take Harkness with us."

"Why?"

"He'd be offended if we didn't. He always comes with us."

"Well, naturally, since neither you nor John ever learned to drive. But now it's different."

"I don't know, I'm sure." She looked so obviously distressed that he was tempted to give in, but he held his peace.

After a few moments' thought, Eleanor, who was a woman of resource, said, "I know. I'll tell him we're taking the Renisons with us. There are three of them, and I'll point out that the only way to avoid leaving you at home is to let you drive the car in his place. I think perhaps it would be best if you were not in the room while I talk to him."

Obediently, Anthony left her and went up to his own quarters. Ten minutes later she joined him there. She was visibly upset.

"It's no good," she said. "When I told him about the Renisons he said he was sure you wouldn't want to drive all the way to Hampstead to fetch them, and said he would do that himself. Hampstead, he said, is in the opposite direction to Haslemere, and he would stand by to take them home again, as he was sure Mr. Anthony would be tired after that long drive."

"Tips, that's all he's after," said Anthony.

"This is what comes of telling lies," said Eleanor. "What are we going to do?"

"Oh, tell him the Renisons have cried off because Mrs. Renison has developed swine fever," he said impatiently.

"A bad headache will be quite sufficient," she said, and went off to do so.

At lunch, she said, "Harkness was so pleased that he could come with us to Haslemere after all."

If Harkness was pleased, Anthony felt peeved, and said he didn't feel like driving the car after all. Rather than have Harkness sitting beside him criticising his treatment of his beloved Humber, he would sit in the back with Eleanor, even though it made him feel uncomfortably like some minor royalty.

So ended, ingloriously, his only attempt to dethrone Harkness. In time he got used to being driven—even began to like it; it was certainly a geat convenience to have permanent transport to and from his office, and no parking problem.

That was the trouble about Eleanor; one fell in with her ways because they made life more comfortable and convenient. It was no use saying, "But I like to run my own bath," or "I like to pack my own suitcase." It was only a matter of time before he would succumb to having such things done for him by the efficient Cartright or Eleanor herself.

He began to see how difficult it must have been for John to fight against the organisation of his life. And the thought that he might follow John's decline to complete dependence filled him with fear. He had seen how, in the end, he had become incapable of making a decision for himself. He remembered, when John had resigned from the golf club to which they both belonged, he had asked him the reason.

"Oh, Eleanor thinks I'm too old," John said. "She's probably right. I sometimes feel pretty done up after eighteen holes."

"Too old at sixty?" Anthony had said. "Rubbish."

"It's all very well for you. You're ten years younger than I am." This was always John's reply when Anthony tried to boost his morale.

It was the same story when they decided to give up their annual winter holiday in the South of France.

"We're getting too old for that long journey," Eleanor had said.

"It's not a long journey if you fly," Anthony had pointed out.

"But what would we do there without Harkness and the car?"

"Send Harkness and the car by road."

"Think of the cost," John had said.

"Yes," said Eleanor. "And really the Riviera didn't do John any good last winter. He had his dyspepsia all the time. I'm sure it was all that oil they used in cooking."

"Why not try somewhere else?"

"It's a risk, trying new places," said Eleanor.

"I think it adds to the pleasure," said Anthony.

"Don't forget you're ten years younger than I am," said John.

The memory of these scenes increased Anthony's determination to resist being reduced to a carbon copy of the submissive John. He insisted on continuing to take a holiday on his own each spring; it had been his habit to go with a friend to a Scottish golfing resort. He returned from these holidays bodily refreshed and with a revived spirit of independence. For a few weeks he believed himself to be out of danger. But sooner or later the atmosphere of the Campden Hill house, with its emphasis on creature comforts and Eleanor's relentless anticipation of his every want, began to reassert itself.

It was one of these holidays which eventually was to provide his first major defeat. He had come home with all the symptoms of having caught a chill. Eleanor took his temperature, ordered him to bed, and had the doctor round in no time. In their joint care he recovered in due course; but on his last visit the doctor told him that he must take more care of himself; his heart was not quite what it should be, and his blood pressure was on the high side. If he, the doctor, were Anthony, he would give up his golf, and for a time take it easy at the office.

From this time on Eleanor assumed responsibility for his health as well as his comfort. For the first time food ceased to be a question of what he liked or disliked, but solely of what was good for him. He remembered that John, in his later life, had suffered from similar restrictions, and sometimes when they lunched together in the city John would order some favourite dish, such as apple dumpling, and say, "Don't tell Eleanor."

Now Anthony found himself doing the same thing, only there was no-one to say "Don't tell Eleanor" to. But she frequently asked him what he had had for lunch, and he would tell her grilled sole, even when it had been steak and kidney pie. He knew he was growing more like John every day, and the thought haunted him. When he looked at himself in the mirror he could fancy that he was becoming more like him in appearance as well. There had always been a strong family likeness between them, but now, with his thinning grey hair and the flabby look that had crept into his face he could believe that he was looking at the John of seven or eight years before. For all his brave intentions,

here he was at seventy-two just where John had been at the same age.

He remembered that it was when he was seventy-two that Eleanor had persuaded John to retire from business. Anthony swore to his reflection in the mirror that he would retire when he wanted to, and not a moment before. In a confused way he felt that this would break the spell that bound him to John; so when Eleanor, as he was sure she would, began to drop hints about cutting down his working hours he answered firmly, "I'm remaining in harness till I retire."

"And when will that be?"

"Not this year, anyway."

"That's what John kept saying, but he had to in the end."

"I know. He had a heart attack."

"I'm trying to save you from having one."

"Don't worry, Eleanor. I've no intention of having one."

"Oh, you men!" said Eleanor. "You never learn."

And sure enough she proved right, for whether it was the annoyance she had generated in him, or the extra brandy he had taken to fortify himself against surrender, that very night he did have a heart attack.

The doctor reassured Eleanor. It was a slight one, and he would get over it with rest; but one thing was certain, he must retire from business. Anthony heard this with resignation; what little fight he had left in him evaporated. He had looked in his old diaries, and found that John's heart attack had taken place on the third day of the fourth month of his seventy-second year, which was precisely when he had had his. Now he knew that he was doomed to follow in John's footsteps to the end.

With a morbid fascination he watched his life degenerate into that of a coddled invalid, just as he had watched John's; and he could do no more to prevent it than John had been able to do. He was quite convinced that just as he had followed him in everything else, so he would die, like John, on his seventy-fifth birthday.

This conviction did not worry him a great deal at first; he accepted it as he had accepted so much in the last ten years. But towards the end of his seventy-fourth year he found he was counting the weeks, and finally the days, that were left to him. As he listened to the radio, he thought, "This may be the last time I shall ever hear that a trough of low pressure in the Atlantic is moving towards the British Isles. I may not even be here when it arrives."

He would pause in the hall to savour the smell of cooking

coming from the kitchen, though in the past he had often complained to Eleanor that Mrs. Bowden should be told to keep the door closed. On the tiny "constitutionals" with Eleanor in Holland Park, whither the faithful Harkness drove them, he would lean on his stick and stare, fascinated, at anything that was growing till his absorption tried Eleanor's patience.

"Come along," she would say. "Standing's bad for your heart."

On the evening before his seventy-fifth birthday, when he rose to go upstairs to bed, Eleanor said, "Would you like me to ask anyone to dinner tomorrow night?"

"Why?"

"It's your birthday, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, so it is," he said, casually. He was sorry she had remembered it; she had probably bought him some expensively useless present which would be wasted.

"I thought perhaps you'd like me to ask Jack and Evelyn?" Jack was his friend of the golfing holidays.

"I don't think it's worth while," he said.

"No. Perhaps it would only tire you. Shall we see how you feel in the morning?"

"Yes," said Anthony. Silly woman, she didn't realise that his birthday would begin in two hours' time. For the last few days his hope that he would die in his sleep had increased, for with every day that passed there was less likelihood of any preceding illness. This would be hard on Eleanor, he knew; for no doubt she had been counting on nursing him through his last bedridden days. Thinking this, he forgot his animosity, and the knowledge that he might never see her again made him warm towards her. Rather sheepishly he kissed her goodnight.

It was seven-thirty in the morning when he was woken by Cartright at his bedside urgently asking him to come to Eleanor's room. "I can't seem to rouse her," she said.

And no wonder, for Eleanor had passed peacefully away.

The staff were very good, and did everything they could to relieve him of the hundred and one things that had to be done, but it was a very long and tiring day. When dinner time came he told Cartright that he wasn't hungry and would go to bed. A little later she went to his room to see if he needed anything, and as she said later, she didn't like the look of him. Without telling him, she rang up the doctor.

He died at two minutes to midnight. The doctor said he died of heart failure due to unaccustomed activity following the shock of his sister-in-law's death.

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BY JOHN LENNON

Dog's Life

TRAGEDY struck at Mosey Flynn before he was thirty. He fell in love. What made it sad was whom he fell in love with. It was one of the Hoolihan girls, and that's as near suicide as a man can get and still live.

The Hoolihans had a place outside Downderry and Downderry was more than pleased about that. There were thirteen of them not counting the mangy old cat. Six sons, six daughters and the old woman. Hoolihan himself had disappeared ten years before, not so much under a cloud as in it.

The two of them never did hit it off—apart from the twelve kids that is. And if anyone raised an eyebrow over the three youngest under ten, Ma Hoolihan used to explain how her dear husband came back now and again to say he was sorry.

When the Hoolihan crowd went out it was not so much a family as a catastrophe looking for somewhere to happen. The sons had backs as broad as billiard tables and the daughters had breasts like twin head-lamps. They lived on this farm where they used to work all day, drink half the night and knock the sawdust out of each other on Saturdays.

Now Mosey you couldn't call a little man, but whenever he was among the Hoolihans he looked like he was standing in a hole.

Well, he went out one July day to where they lived, Hoolihan Patch. Mosey was an animal man. He handled dogs the way everyone wishes he could, and he could do more with a horse than anyone—except another horse.

There he was, then, with the heart nearly bursting out of him

for the sight of Katie. Like all the Hoolihans, she was one of the dark Irish. Her figure was nothing but smooth slopes and brown skin. Her hair streamed to her shoulders like tumbling black water. Two ear-rings danced like drops of gold in the sunlight, and her voice had the sadness and music of the autumn wind. She also had a wicked right cross.

Mosey pulled his horse and cart over to the barn where Big John was standing.

"Hello, John," he said, jumping down, "I heard tell you're after wanting a dog."

Big John grunted, spat and nearly decapitated a passing chicken.

"Mebbe," he said, "let's see what you've got."

Mosey stood while the dog was being examined. He let his eyes rove the horizon like a prospector looking for water. Not a sign of Katie.

"I'll have him," said Big John straightening up. "Half-a-guinea, a sack of spuds and I'll take no arguin'."

"He's yours," said Mosey, "and you'll never get a better one. He'll jump at the name of Nat." He pocketed the money and dodged the sack of potatoes that Big John tossed past his ear, but his heart was filled with sweet melancholy. He'd come to Hoolihan Patch not to sell a dog but to give his heart. Yet his goddess, his Juno, his dark-haired Alana was nowhere. She was probably feeding the pigs.

"How's the pigs?" Mosey heard himself saying.

"Never mind the pigs," said Big John. "Will you drink some tea?"

"I will that," said Mosey quickly. "I'm choking."

Big John loped off towards the farmhouse with great, gangling strides and poor Mosey all the time walking on his two big toes to look taller.

"And the family, John—all fit and well?" asked Mosey craftily.

"Ah, don't spoil a fine day," Big John said shortly.

They entered the farmhouse and three ducks skittered out. Big John stepped over a young pig, kicked the cat and picked up a big, tin teapot.

"D'you like it strong, then?" he asked, pouring out two cups of neat varnish.

"I do, and thank you," Mosey said, sipping tea that had been stewed for a fortnight.

"Johnnie!" bawled a woman's voice from the kitchen, "who's that you have in there?"

"Go and see her," ordered Big John, "before she pulls the place down."

Mosey went into the kitchen and faced Ma Hoolihan. Even for a Hoolihan, she was big. She stood over the kitchen table, hands like shovels, hips like a heifer, her face shining with smile and sweat.

"Well now, Mosey," she said, "it's decent of you to come and say good morning to a body."

"And it's great to see you, Mrs. Hoolihan," said Mosey. He watched in fascinated horror as she suddenly attacked the mountain of dough on the table. Throwing two meaty arms around it, she began pummelling unmercifully.

"You're cooking then, ma'am?" ventured Mosey.

"Ah, it's cooking I am all right," agreed Ma Hoolihan and with a sudden twist she turned and threw the dough at an old mangle behind her.

"Are you cooking or washing?" asked Mosey, staring incredulously.

"You might ask," she said, turning away like mad, "but when you're feeding a tribe like mine, God knows you have to think big."

Mosey looked behind the mangle where a gigantic flat dough cake was slowly crawling out.

"Well, I never seen that before," he whispered.

"What else can a poor woman do?" demanded Ma Hoolihan as she picked up a handful of flour and hurled it at the mangle rollers. "I'd never have a minute if I didn't think for meself now and then."

"Mother!" The word fell like the note of a bell and Katie stood in the doorway.

Mosey's insides gave a great heave and his legs suddenly took palsy.

"Don't be covering poor Mosey with self-raising," she said, walking in. "He'll never set foot in the place again."

"Katie," said Mosey weakly, "how—how are you?"

"Hard-worked but happy," she said, and her smile seized Mosey's heart and shook it. She wore an old grey shirt that pointed two turrets of love at him and her dusty green trousers hid little.

"Mosey," she said softly, standing so close he could feel the warmth of her, "will you ride me back to the village?"

"I will," said Mosey, half-way out the door, "with pleasure."

They walked out into the sunshine with Mosey feeling like the King of Ireland, and reached his horse and cart. She floated up

to the seat beside him and began singing as they jogged down the track to the road.

There's only one man I will marry
And handsome as summer he'll be.
There's only one man I will marry;
That's the man who will marry me.

She stopped and laughed aloud. "Ah, it's marriage on the brain I've got," she said without looking at him.

"Have you now?" Mosey felt inside him a fierce surge of hope and the taste of old tea.

"And why not?" she asked, "with the wedding only a week away?"

"Wedding?" He could hardly say the word.

"Did you not know? Brother Jamie's getting wed this day week. Aren't I going now to get me dress?"

"Jamie?" Mosey felt the sun on his face again. "Never a word I heard."

"Ah well," she smiled at him, "truth to tell it's a bit of a rush, if you know what I mean. Jamie's a wild one, you know that well enough."

"Great news, Katie. May they both live long and die happy."

She turned her dark blue eyes on him. "Thank you, Mosey, you're a good soul. But what am I thinking of—" she threw her hands upwards, "—you'll be there!"

"I will?" Mosey could think of nothing else to say.

"You will that. Oh, it'll be a fine old do, with Ginny the fiddler and Tom O'Donnell and his melodeon. You'll come, Mosey, won't you?"

"Well—if it's all right—"

She jerked upwards with arms akimbo.

"And who says it's not all right?"

"Nobody—only I thought—"

"This day week," she said firmly, "Father Murphy will wed them at eleven-thirty. We'll leave the church at twelve, straight into the back room of Mulligan's bar, and after that it's anybody's guess."

"God help us," said Mosey piously.

"Ah, it'll be great," she said, smiling at the sun. "The first wedding in the family. The whole crowd'll be there. Jamie of course, John, Shamus, Mike, Dominic and Joseph. And all the girls will have new dresses. There'll be Maggie, Bridie, Maidie, Bonnie and little Patsy."

"—and you," added Mosey tenderly.

"Ah, you couldn't keep me away," she laughed, already tasting the happiness.

They pulled out on to the road, and, with the sun on its back, Mosey's nag clacked a delicate rhythm.

"Katie," said Mosey, staring fixedly at the horse's rippling hind quarters, "did you never . . . I mean . . . well, y'know—"

"Me marry?" she plucked the words from his mind. "Ah now, that's something. When I meet him, sure I'll marry. Whether he likes it or not. He'll be as tall as a tree and as strong as the sea." She drew her knees together and hugged her shoulders. "I'll know him a mile away and he'll make straight for me."

Mosey's heart touched the soles of his feet. She might have been confiding to the horse. She probably was.

"Well, y'know . . . I was just wondering like . . ." His mouth had gone dry and he felt a small man. "Good luck to you, Katie. I hope you don't have to dream too long."

"Ah," she suddenly became confused, "take no heed, Mosey, for God's sake. When I'm sitting in the sun I just blather like a babe."

He shook the reins, realising that he wanted the journey to finish, and they rode into Downderry.

The people of Downderry, not notoriously peace-loving at any time, were near to panic when they heard the news. The whole Hoolihan family in Downderry at the one time—and no doubt the mangy old cat, too. With a wedding thrown in, it was like lighting a fire in a coal mine.

Nothing was unanimous, though. Some of them were for barricading the village, others pondered on mass emigration. A few of the older ones even suggested calling on the National Guard. But the promise of excitement and a legal excuse for settling a few old scores proved strong.

On the day of the wedding, then, Downderry was watchful but steady, and at midday the Hoolihans streamed out of the church almost like Christians. Jamie, in a borrowed suit, stood in the centre with his bride as the congratulatory slaps on his broad back raised a cloud of dust.

Mosey stood on the edge of the crowd, looking for the flying black tresses of Katie. When he saw her he let out a little moan. She had piled her hair high with careless elegance and her dress was white and simple. She seemed remote from any man less than a legend. What's more, with her hair up she was even taller than he was. She darted forward and grabbed his arm, pulling him into the crowd as they walked down to Mulligan's bar.

Mulligan, accepting the inevitable, had stripped the back room almost bare. Everything that could be lethal, smashed or stolen had been removed. But with a sentimental heart he had smothered the place in green leaves and flowers.

Within half an hour the whole world was forgotten. Glasses of golden whiskey were raised and pints of dark, malt stout were lowered. Through the open windows the summer scent of roses lay on the air like a blessing.

Mosey sat in one corner watching his beloved dance a reel with three others. Her white dress lifted and swirled and her brown legs flashed. Not a man in the room, drinking or singing, except her brothers, took his eyes off her. Already they were beginning to thump the beer table and drown the music with loud voices.

Mosey felt hot and unhappy. He slipped out of the room and into the garden where the laden bees lurched among the blooms and the beer was piled high in crates. He sat on a box and let the sun close his eyes. Ah, it was a sad, hard world when the only girl you ever wanted was within arm's reach—yet untouchable.

A thin whine made him look down and he felt his hand being licked by Nat. He fondled the soft, floppy ears and confided, "Well, at least you'll be nearer to her than me—lucky dog."

The animal turned away and began sniffing at the crates, and even as Big John lumbered out for more beer it lifted one leg and gently sprayed a dozen Guinness.

Big John's bellow of rage stunned the air. Nat hurriedly switched off and looked for an avenue of escape, but he was cornered. Big John had been simmering gently for an hour and was more than ready to rant.

"All on me beer! You dirty heathen hound!" His foot was already drawn back for a kick that would have lifted the mongrel clear of the church tower when Mosey found himself moving.

"Leave him be, John," he said, and put his hand on the big man's shoulder.

Big John stopped in puzzled tolerance. "You must've drunk too much, Mosey," he said happily. "Ah, but I'll sober you up."

Mosey's next impression was hazy. He had a faint recollection of being hit, first by a blast of beery breath and then by the flat end of an elephant's foot.

He gathered himself up from the ground, slowly picked a geranium from his hair and looked at Big John's grinning face. Then the Flynn blood sang, and he threw a punch he didn't even know he owned. It landed on solid bone and Big John staggered.

"Him!" he appealed to the crowd indignantly. "The little fella—he hit me!"

Again Mosey's feet left the ground, the garden spun and he found himself deposited on a beer crate. He wanted to get up again and fight but he wasn't sure where he'd left his legs. So he just waited. The *coup de grâce* never came.

From out of the crowd of happy, satisfied spectators came a blur of brown and white. Katie made straight for Big John with the speed of a meteor. Half-way there she began shaping for the right cross. Arriving there, she planted it deep in his solar plexus. Big John announced a gusty "*whoof*" and slowly collapsed.

Mosey heard a flurry, felt two soft arms around his neck and with them the heavenly scent of Katie.

"Mosey darlin', are you all right?"

"Who, me?" asked Mosey, trying to uncross his eyes.

"Ah, that was a great thing y'did, Mosey. You took on Big John for a wee scrap of a dog."

"Ah, well now, the mongrel was giving a bit of weight away—"

"Mosey darlin'," her face was close to his, "you're for me. You're the one."

"You're feeling sorry for me—" started Mosey.

"I am not," she gripped him firmly. "Sure I've had men fightin' over me ever since I bought me first dress. But would they fight for a little animal? Never one of them. You did, Mosey. You're the man."

"But you said 'as tall as a tree'," he objected weakly, " 'and as strong as the sea'. God knows I'm not that."

"You are Mosey darlin', you are—to me."

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (MAY ISSUE)

ACROSS. 1, *Comes clean*. 6, *Oslo*. 10, *Marking*. 11, *Torment*. 12, *Director*. 13, *Serif*. 15, *At last*. 17, *Flounder*. 19, *I'll buy it*. 21, *Become*. 24, *Tired*. 25, *Theories*. 28, *Almoner*. 29, *Epitaph*. 30, *Earn*. 31, *Playfellow*.

DOWN. 1, *Come*. 2, *Martial*. 3, *Shine*. 4, *Lights*. 5, *After all*. 7, *Sheared*. 8, *Out of order*. 9, *Pressure*. 14, *Magistrate*. 16, *Sounding*. 18, *Littoral*. 20, *Lorimer*. 22, *Overall*. 23, *Merely*. 26, *Rhine*. 27, *Thaw*.

Bath Time

Someone had drawn the ragged curtains in the bathroom to shut out the damp old day, and the bath was half full of water with a rubber duck floating on it. As Polly closed and locked the door birds began to sing.

"It's only the birds," she said. She put the key down her dress. "You needn't be frightened."

. . . She sat by his side on the edge of the bath. He could not think of anything to say. Here was the locked door he had often made up in stories and in his head, in bed in Mortimer Street, and the warm, hidden key, and the girl who was willing for anything. The bathroom should be a bedroom and she should not be wearing glasses.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Adventures in the Skin Trade*

Moment of Truth

I test my bath before I sit,
And I'm always moved to wonderment
That what chills the finger not a bit
Is so frigid upon the fundament.

OGDEN NASH, *Samson Agonistes*

Order of the Bath

The person who takes the bath should be orderly and reserved in his manner, should do nothing for himself, but others should pour the water upon him and rub him.

HIPPOCRATES

BIG SPLASH

Then Mr. Salteena got into a mouve dressing goun with yellaw tassles and siezing his soap he wandered off to the bath room which was most sumpshous.

It had a lovly white shiny bath and sparkling taps and several towels arrayed in readiness by thourghtful Horace.

It also had a step for climbing up to the bath and other good dodges of a rich nature.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Young Visiters*

LAMENT IN A FLAT

I what is called luxuriated in what is called the bathroom in what are called luxury flats. In a thin green bath designed to keep the knees of a not very tall man above water: in a green tiled box with pus-coloured plastic curtains and a chromium towel-rail and a dwarf lavatory to cramp further a space in which one can hardly swing a towel: in a place of bright, poisonous green—so cheery!—and of thin plates of plastic—already cracked—and all the dingy hygienic brittle—cry: Get in and get out, quick!

WILLIAM SANSOM, *Pleasures Strange and Simple*

I had a friend—my friend no more—
Who failed to bolt the bathroom door;
A maiden aunt of his, one day,
Walked in, as half-submerged he lay...
His aunt fell fainting to the ground.
Alas! they never brought her round!

HARRY GRAHAM,
Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes

IMPERIAL PREFERENCE

The Emperor Commodus is reported to have had a hot bath seven times a day; and who can blame him? Rich women have bathed themselves in milk, sometimes in the milk of 500 she-asses at once. But water is better, for milk, if hot, would form a skin. The slimy touch of that white, crinkly skin next to one's own . . .

ROSE MACAULAY, *Personal Pleasures*

Do not take a bath in Jordan,
Gordon . . .

DAME EDITH SITWELL, *Scotch Rhapsody*

A Pre-Raphaelite
Had to have things right.
The patient redhead, Elizabeth Siddal,
Lay in the bathtub up to her middle
(But richly gowned)
To show what she would look like drowned.
At last she sneezed: Oh Mr. Millais,
Do I 'ave to welter 'ere all day?
It's enough to congeal ya,
Posing for Ophelia.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *Mandarin in Manhattan*

I also visited the bagnois where a rich man can sup, bathe and sleep with a fashionable courtesan, of which species there are many in London. It makes a magnificent debauch and only costs six guineas.

CASANOVA, 1765

Dip and Diet

The practice of eating a mutton chop, beef steak, or drinking hot and strong tea or coffee while in the bath, or as soon as taken, is a very bad practice.

R.D.B. WELLS, 1885

Longing *for the* Glorious Years

by Cledwyn Hughes

MISTER EVANS went to the bank twice a year to count his money; and he was the last man in the parish to put a cross instead of his name on official papers. But pieces of writing meant little to him, hard cash meant much; thus he never believed the balance-sheet which was sent to him by the bank twice yearly. His housekeeper, Messiah, would read out the balance and Mister Evans would memorise it.

Some time in the first week of July or January the old farmer would go into the market town. The bank manager always knew what the old farmer wanted in these two special times of the year. The manager would take Mister Evans into his private office to talk about the weather, the crops and the dreadful state of the country.

Meanwhile one of the staff would be down in the vaults making piles of pound notes and cash equal to the balance standing to the name of Mister Evans in the ledger. Then the manager and the old man would go down to the strong-room, solemnly and rather slowly. There Mister Evans would count the notes into hundreds; that was the height of his power, one hundred. Then he would count the hundreds, be satisfied, and would be shown out into the daylight again. Doubtless it was all very irregular. But Mister Evans' account was always about ten thousand pounds; a goodly sum to be in an account with no interest demanded and never a cheque drawn upon it.

Mister Evans was now aged seventy-four; legally a bachelor, a staunch churchman, and having no affection for anyone except Messiah, his housekeeper. And this woman, Messiah, was something of an oddity. She had been Christened with this

slightly blasphemous name by her father, a travelling professional revivalist living in sin with a gipsy fortune-teller. The girl had been born at Christmas time, and it was appropriate that she should have been called Messiah. She had gone into domestic service as soon as she could work; had gone across England from one great house to another.

She had come to the farm of Mister Evans in the springtime. That had been twenty years ago. Their relationship came as near to bliss and happiness as was possible. They had intended to marry at first, but the laughter of the parish at the first reading of the banns had frightened them. And in some sort of way they both understood that certificates and blessings made little difference to them.

It was in May that the darkness came to the eyes of Mister Evans. It was a grievous time to lose sight, what with the hay-grass growing green in the meadows. But blindness came suddenly to Mister Evans like the sudden closing of curtains. For one hour he stared mistily at the retreating world he had known; the walnut trees at the fringe of the yard, the barns, the fields sloping into the valley. Further than that he could not see, and every minute his vision was closing in on itself.

He was standing by the back door of the farmhouse when the dimness first came to him.

He called out loudly, "Messiah."

She came out of the dairy-room, a lithe, sweet-faced woman, her ankle-high boots creaking with the speed of her walking and her great black hair in sea-weed strands across her sweaty face. She had been at the churning.

"What is it?" she asked.

"My sight, Messiah, it is going."

She came up to him and waved her hand in front of his face.

"There now, can you see that?"

Irritated, and as if afraid of losing the closing view for even one second, he pushed her hand down.

"Is the night coming?" he asked, fearfully.

Messiah shook her head.

"Why, no, it is only about ten o'clock. Ten in the morning."

Mister Evans repeated the words after her, slowly. "Ten in the morning. And does the sun shine?"

"Why, yes, and Lower Farm are starting their hay-cutting. Can you not see the machine over there?" And she pointed vigorously away to the north.

In his mind's eye only did Mister Evans see the distance.

"It is no good, Messiah, blindness is coming to me."

She came up behind him and put an arm about his brown and wrinkled neck.

"Sit on the stone."

There were never any endearments or many tender words between them. He sat on a ledge by the back door, but the height of the wall between the Little Yard and the Great Yard cut off his limited view. He stood up with a great sigh and stood against the wall.

Messiah bundled her hair about her head and skewered it in on itself as if at bedtime; then she went to her master.

"Is there any pain? Shall I fetch the doctor? Shall I bathe your eyes?"

His voice became a little hoarse as he answered. She knew that was as near as he ever got to tenderness and emotion.

"No, no. Let me be. The minutes are precious."

They stood side by side against the wall, with the May sun rising higher to noon and warming the earth, and making the first black flies of the summer hum on the bricks and stones.

After half an hour Mister Evans turned to Messiah, and said, "A little pain has come."

She put up one of her hands, the yellow skin white with dried flour at the finger nails. She smoothed the grey hair around his ears.

"Is it better or worse now?" she asked.

"The pain is better but the sight is worse."

"Oh."

For another half an hour they stood in silence. Then Mister Evans turned to his housekeeper.

"I am blind, Messiah."

She took him quietly into the house.

In the following days and weeks Messiah led Mister Evans about from place to place like a beloved dog. The land was let to others and the stock sold. The doctor came often and Mister Evans had to make one of the longest journeys of his life to the county town to see a specialist. But there was nothing that could be done. Mister Evans was rather glad of that. He feared hospitals and operations even more than the darkness which had come to him.

He changed his habits a little. He became gentler with Messiah and in church said his responses in time with the other people; not lagging as he once had done. He repeated old hymns to himself and even spoke a little Welsh, the language of his childhood but which he had almost lost. To Messiah he spoke often, and

he could not bear to be alone. Indeed it was silence he feared most. They talked often; it was like the weeks of their first love all over again.

And Messiah hoped that, with all this change that had come to him, perhaps Mister Evans would not want to go to the bank in the first week of July. She tried to confuse him with time, to call June, May. But it was useless.

On a Friday of the first week of July he said, "This morning we will go to the bank, Messiah."

She tried to dissuade him, but he insisted.

Messiah hired a car for the journey. They arrived at the bank just before midday. Outside, Mister Evans paused for a while and rubbed his hands on the warm stones of the bank building. A small crowd had gathered to watch. Messiah stood by her master, hoping that he would not hear the gossip and sénse the wonder.

"Come in," she said.

"I just wanted to feel the stones, Messiah; make sure the money is in the right place."

She jerked at the point of his elbow with a new fierceness. Meekly he allowed himself to be led in. One of the men at the counter called the manager. To him Messiah had to explain what had happened to Mister Evans; and what he wanted today.

The manager was worried, Messiah could see that. He took them into his private room and sat them side by side on chairs. He talked of the weather, of the delightful sunshine; of oats and barley and his wife's arthritis.

Mister Evans stared blandly at the man. At last the old farmer spoke.

"My money, is it safe?"

"Why yes, as usual, Mr. Evans."

"Can I see it, please?"

There was a pause then, the only sound a distant lawn mower in one of the town gardens. That, and the murmur of counted money from the bank.

The manager looked at Messiah; seemed to be waiting for her to speak. But it was Mister Evans who spoke again, his voice rising in pitch with the insistence of impatience.

"My money, is it here? Take me to see it."

"Why, yes—" the manager stood up, his very white hands flapping the air like a helpless bird wanting to fly. He could deal with overdrafts and stocks and shares, but a blind old man was a worry to him.

Messiah levered her best floral hat to the back of her head. She spoke close to the ear of her master.

"Have you forgotten?"

The old man shook his head and his blue eyes moved listlessly in their sockets. "I want to see my money."

Messiah spoke again to him, quite gently.

"There has been a change since last time, a change, do you not remember? Shall I see the money for you? It will have to be me, won't it?"

He only seemed to realise then, to understand. He swayed on the plush chair and his white-knuckled hands came into a knot on the polished top of the desk.

"I cannot, can I?"

The manager reached over and patted Mister Evans benevolently.

"It'll be all right, Mr. Evans. You can trust us. We won't be more than a minute. Come, Mr. Evans, come to the window and sit in the sunshine."

Like an invalid child they moved him to the window seat. Unblinking he stared out at the yellow band of light. They left him and went to the corridor outside. There the manager halted and wriggled his head above the closure of his stiff white collar.

"You are no relation of his?"

"No."

"Not his wife?"

"No."

Messiah expected him to walk along. She could see the vault at the end of the passage, a pale red light glowing above the grille of the door. The manager spoke again.

"With Mr. Evans it was different. He didn't believe in money unless he saw it. I'm sure you will appreciate that his balance is safe and secure?"

"Yes."

"There's really no need for us to go on, is there?"

"If you don't trust me there's not much use in it, is there?"

He wriggled his head with embarrassment and smoothed her shoulder with his soft white hand.

"Dear me, no, don't misunderstand me. With Mr. Evans it was different. He is something of an exception, an eccentric. He had to see his money. It isn't that I don't trust you."

"If I was his wife or a relation it would be different, I suppose?"

"Well, the bank has its rules. I am only a servant of those rules, as you will understand."

In silent hostility they faced each other. A clerk went by with a ledger and Messiah could smell the faintness of after-shave lotion from his well-groomed body. She turned towards the private office, at the same time speaking: "We're both of us important to Mr. Evans. His money is between us. But I understand your position."

"Thank you."

They went back to the private room. Mister Evans came hesitantly out of the sunlight towards them.

"My money, is it safe, Messiah?"

She paused before answering, and then she spoke loudly and clearly. "No, I cannot see it there, master."

It was her triumph. The bank manager turned towards her, his arms in a flutter of alarm.

"Oh, madam—" But by now Messiah had approached Mister Evans and was speaking close to his face.

"Not a trace, master. They have hidden it away. Demand to take it home with us."

With a fierceness Mister Evans stumbled towards the desk.

"Give me my money, the cash I must have to take with us."

The manager tried to soothe him, but it was useless. After a little time the manager went for forms and a blank cheque. Mister Evans put his great hands on the papers and slowly made his cross with a pen against the edge of his fingers. The manager went to the strong-room with two of his staff. They came up again with notes; checked and counter-checked. They put them into a linen bag and with hardly a word showed Mister Evans and Messiah to the outside of the bank and into the car.

She could feel their hatred as they shut the door upon her and her master and the linen bag. And as the car drove away the manager did not wave, neither did he say goodbye.

In the back of the car Mister Evans and Messiah murmured sometimes to each other. He was like some child escaped from school bullies and near to his mother again; she all in a calm tenderness.

It was not until she helped her master out of the car in the dry, quiet yard of the farm that Messiah became afraid again; coming out of the car was like re-entry into an old familiar world. She was hoping that he would forget the bag of money. But it was not so. He asked for it, quite simply.

"The bag," he said.

That gave her hope; he was asking for the bag, not for money.

The driver handed it out to them. He waited to be paid.

"I'll settle for the taxi," said Messiah.

That done, the car drove away. Mister Evans rose slowly from the bench where he had been put to sit, his hands scraping the whitewashed wall behind and causing a little dust.

"Messiah," he said, "give me the bag of money, please."

He had never said please to her before; always, night and day, there had been a masterful way about him. She gave him the bag. He fumbled about it, felt its shape and shook it as a child would shake a rattle. Then he held it out in his quavering arms, the sun making a great shadow of it on the white wall.

"Take it, Messiah, you keep all this."

"Me, master?"

"Do not call me that; there is no master now in this house. Take the bag, please."

In a great surge of emotion she took the bag and led Mister Evans into the cool, quiet kitchen for a meal. And as she fed him gently with a spoon she understood suddenly that she now had to mother him. He was to be the makeshift for the child which could never come.

After his meal she brushed his hair and set him on the bench outside in the sunlight. Then she went to weep in the upstairs loneliness of the house, longing for the glorious years when she had been a mistress.

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A DESERTED BEACH

Silently the little Crab crawled along the beach,
The wind howls,
The Crab rolls over,
He hits a rock,
The Crab lies still,
There is no movement . . .
He is dead.
The beach is deserted, empty.

Where are the sea-gulls and Oysters?
Where are the Cockles and Mussels?
Where are the Sandcastles?

They have been there,
But now . . . they have gone,
Where have they gone?
Nobody knows . . .
Except the greedy sea.

—Robin Charles Smallman, eight-year-old pupil at the St. Lawrence College Junior School, Ramsgate, Kent, an award winner in the Daily Mirror*'s Eighth Children's Literary Competition.*

He belonged to the glamorous world of that modern marvel, the moving picture. Surely here was a young man with the world at his feet? But the acid test was still to come.

A CINEMATOGRAPH KING

BY PHILIP NORMAN

SOPHIE Skitterell lived with her father, her mother, old Renie Skitterell, and her four sisters, Alice, Faith, crippled Louie and Elizabeth, at 99, Anderley Road, Lambeth. This was a tall, marvellously warm house which old Renie filled with the hot billows of her bubble-and-squeak, or faggots and peas, or stewed eels with mash. Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell kept four top hats in leather hatboxes under the kitchen dresser; pigeons up the garden.

Sophie was tiny, with pretty legs and lips but not an exceptional head of hair. It was Elizabeth, the youngest girl, taller than the others and almost twice as tall as old Renie, who had the beautiful hair; and Sophie made that her special concern, brushing and plaiting it until her arms ached, before they went to bed.

She was smart, warm-tempered, unworldly, and she was terribly fond of ice-cream: at eighteen, when she met Frank Toy, Sophie would still rush into the road with an eight-ounce tumbler when she heard Bazzanio's ice-cream cart trundle by. You would scarcely have said she was ideally matched with Frank, then twenty-two and living near the Oval. Frank was neat, rather dry; the things he said made a girl laugh questioningly; and he was a splendid cricketer. Clever, too—he was one of the two projectionists at a recently opened cinema, where courting couples used to wriggle under the stage and knock the screen over with rough cuddling.

Sophie met Frank at one of the Sunday League Concerts

denis wrigley

given in 1907 by the Liberal and Radical Club of Streatham.

Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell, Sophie's father, was a scientific instrument-maker who spent his evenings as stage-manager at Gatty's Music Hall in the Westminster Bridge Road, and his weekends praying or at billiards in the club: a stout, uproarious man, fifty-eight, with a watch-chain pulled taut across his pepper-and-salt waistcoat. Wherever he went he seemed magically to reserve whole front rows for his wife and daughters and to produce bananas and chocolate creams for them to share.

All of them went to the club twice a week, for there were plays on a Tuesday as well as the Sunday concerts. One night, all the women joined in happily as a tenor sang a new song about a little chimney sweep, *Ten Dirty Little Fingers On Two Dirty Little Hands*; and old Renie rapped her boot on the floor in time. Frank Toy sat at the side with the unattached young men, not joining in but interested in the mole he could see in relief on old Renie's well-powdered cheek.

Sophie wore a beautiful hat, bought with a whole week's wages from Nantell Gluckstein's. On hearing what it cost, old Renie had pulled it from its bandbox and stamped on it a few times, but the hat seemed to be undented; a lovely hat with a beige feather curling about the brim, as thick and co-operative as a sleepy Persian cat. Sophie also wore a beige blouse and brown suit and boots.

When the tenor, a custard-powder salesman named Blake, hurried from the stage to make way for Al Raschid, Hindoo Illusionist, Bafflement of the Crowned Heads of Europe, Sophie gave a bright smile to the man sitting behind her with a girl she knew vaguely: Chocolate Alice, the assistant in the sweet kiosk down Goring Cut.

"Is my hat blocking any of your views?" Sophie asked him.

"No, no, my love, that's quite all right," the man replied. "That's all right. It's very nice."

The Hindoo came on the stage and had not been performing more than three minutes when old Renie, with a tremendous explosion of Fry's silver paper, said audibly, "Huh, I don't think much of 'im. Not the kind of turn I like."

And the man sitting with Chocolate Alice began to talk as loudly about Sophie's hat. "Blooming great pedestal," he called it. "So thick there's fuzzy-wuzzies hiding inside, shouldn't wonder. Why didn't you tie it up outside before you come in? Frightened someone would fix it to a four-wheeler and drive away? Eh, love?" Chocolate Alice gave an admiring laugh. That was too much.

Sophie turned round in a fury; Louie and Elizabeth turned round to watch. "Don't you be so rude. Don't you dare make remarks. I asked you if it was in your way and you said 'No'. Don't you turn round and say it's in the way, you show-off." Her eye ran over him. "Old bear grease. Can you peel your hair off at night-time?"

"Quiet, girl," Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell's voice ordered.

But Sophie continued in an enraged whisper: "Keep your big old face out of other people's business. Go and sit behind a pillar." And to Chocolate Alice: "I dunno what you're gurgling at, Monkey-Brand." Then something made her look across to the line of young men sitting at the side of the hall; at a particular fellow she thought her Dad knew. He was wagging his head, pursing his mouth and bridling: he was taking her off. Sophie stopped abusing the man behind, tossing her head. The imitative young man seemed to laugh at her, without doing more than smiling his slit of a smile.

Sophie felt his eye on her for the rest of the concert, an annoying thing to happen since she could eat no more bananas and could only nibble one more chocolate cream instead of swallowing a further twelve.

When the lights went on, Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell stood up, dusted his large, fat stomach and promised to fetch his family a tray of stout. After old Renie had taken clubfoot Louie, a plaintive girl, to the Ladies, Sophie was amazed to find the young man, who had taken her off, slipping into Louie's empty seat. He had a smile of celebration now but, Sophie thought, a rather prim mouth. Yes, it was prim.

"Well, you gave Wilfred White what-for," the young man said, leaning slightly across Elizabeth.

"Mmm." Sophie studied him. Blue serge suit, very nice, properly buttoned. Cutaway coat. Pink shirt. Bow. Straw hat left on his chair.

"Excuse me, but I expect you'll be one of Harry Skitterell's beautiful daughters I've heard such a lot about."

"I am; I mean, I don't know about beautiful." What a talker.

"May I introduce myself? Name's Toy. My friends call me Frank. How do you do? That's a beautiful hat and outfit if I may say so. Which of the lovely daughters are you? If I may ask."

"You may." Sophie arched her brows, knowing that she looked nice when she did. "I'm Sophie, this is my sister Elizabeth and that girl over there, talking to the trooper, is Faith." Frank Toy aimed a long-range bow at Faith, which she didn't see, and said, "What a lovely family."

Sophie and Elizabeth sat rather awkwardly and, for a few minutes, looked as if each of Frank's compliments would knock them down; then Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell came back with a trayload of Guinness. It was a surprise to see Frank greet him as if they had been schoolboys together. Frank called him Harry to his face and they began to talk about billiards and about Gatty's.

"She says, 'I've got second billing, so I don't 'ave to take me own band calls.' The sauce. Soppy cat," grumbled Sophie's father, recalling a brush with a music hall queen. "Stupid cat. What would you do with them? I'm thankful our Sophie didn't go into that. Put my foot down, didn't I, girl?"

Sophie gave him one of her glares. She resented her father's interference in what both she and her best friend, Tessie Cummings, had agreed would have been a splendid career for Sophie in musical comedy. At the age of six she had been employed for seven shillings a week by Laurence Byron's Touring Theatre, to kneel in the middle of the stage and pray for her Daddy to come home safe from the wars. Mr. Cavendish had offered Harold Skitterell a contract for his daughter to tour with the play, taking in Leeds, Stockport, Newcastle (the Empire), Aberdeen and Dingwall. Harold Skitterell had refused. He had been quite sharp with Laurence Byron.

Frank said something about her making a perfect leading lady.

Most of the young people were leaving the club now, to drink yellow lemonade in the pie shops along the Lambeth Walk which remained lit and steamy until after midnight. Frank Toy was at the end of the Skitterell row, talking quickly to Sophie's father, darting glances and grins at her as if his machine difficulties at the Biograph were hers alone. Chocolate Alice and her escort, who had been laughing and shouting with someone in the orchestra pit, walked past. Outrageously, Chocolate Alice dug a finger into Frank's back. "Night, Magic Lantern Man," she said.

"Here comes Mum at last," remarked Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell.

"Thank God we're out of that jam!" said Sophie. "Some people don't know when to stop barging. Act as if they were dragged up. And this hat's giving me a headache." Rainwater had changed the fruit into slithery pampas grass.

Louie scowled as she always did when she saw a young man making up to one of her sisters.

"Who may this be?" old Renie asked.

"Why," Sophie's father said, as if old Renie had no business not to know, "this is Albie Toy's son, Frank, who's been in odd

nights to give me a hand at Gatty's. Good boy. Does a good job of work, eh, boy? Going to come and sit with us in the lounge? Have a glass of stout if you like."

So they all went into the club lounge with the potted ferns and lah-di-dah waiter whom old Renie loved to insult. "Don't you worry about us, my boy. We brung our own drinks." The basket chair gave a deathly moan as she put her bottom in it. "He doesn't look silly enough to give a tip on a bottle of stout, does he?" she asked, indicating her husband.

"But why not have a little one with me, ladies?" Frank said. "Little drop of port, Mrs. Skitterell, little drop of fire. Come on. Bit of fizz with it and you'll feel like the Queen of the Nile, won't she, Harry?"

"Ooo! Cheek. Listen to him." Old Renie was impressed. "'Ere, tell us what it's like showing them moving pictures Dad keeps on about. I only been to one. Silly damned thing I thought it was. Load of fellows with sunhats riding donkeys backwards."

"Oh no, Mrs. Skitterell, you mustn't condemn them straight away. I mean, please don't make a hasty judgment. This is the thing of the future, the cinematograph, and very, very artistic. You should see the expressions on people's faces when they see some of them, the Wild West ones; the revolvers going off and blokes dropping off their horses. I showed a lovely one the week before last about fellows rolling logs down a river like they do in Alaska; some ladies screamed, it looked so realistic. Honest."

"Huh. Not the kind of turn I like," said old Renie.

But Sophie—Sophie was entranced. A dapper young man who paid compliment after compliment, who moved in a world where pictures themselves moved, cowboys shot one another and men rolled logs down a river. How could you possibly compare Charlie Hammond to Frank? Old Charlie Hammond who sold ties and collar-bones in Kennington High Road? Or George Clementson, the clerk in the tram office? You couldn't.

"Get you all in some night if you like. The full show lasts about five and twenty minutes. Love and swordfighting, tales about secret spies. Then we could all have our suppers in Franco De Marco's over the road afterwards. Eh?"

Old Renie said she was jiggered if she wanted to go, but the girls nodded their heads furiously.

They stayed in the lounge, very agreeably, until after eleven. Frank walked with them to the corner of Leom Court Road and Sophie was impressed to see him stop a hansom and tilt his straw hat over his eye, just like the dancer in the concert, before getting in. "Ta-ta, then," he called, and the Skitterells moved off

down Anderley Road, their boots sounding on the pavement as if fifty sisters were marching somewhere.

"He does give himself airs, but not in a nasty way," Elizabeth said to Sophie. "Nice though, isn't he, Frank? Do you think he looks foreign?"

"No, I don't think he looks foreign."

"Doesn't he know a lot about moving pictures and that? Do you think he will take us to the cinematograph thing, and out for supper afterwards?"

"Dunno," said Sophie and, airily: "Dunno if I would if he asked me."

"Coo, lies." They punched each other and walked faster. Old Renie always got the chip pan out after Sunday League concerts.

"Where we going?"

"Tivoli, Norwood. Tea-dancing." Sophie and her best friend Tessie were in the bedroom Sophie shared with Faith. It was the following Saturday and the next day was Harold's and old Renie's Silver Wedding Anniversary. The sun was out in Anderley Road after dinner and a carter with a beautiful singing voice had just passed. Old Renie, downstairs, was banging pots and dishes after a tremendous meal of boiled mutton, greens, potatoes and treacle tart. "What time were they supposed to call?"

"Half past two. Frank's bringing Ginger or someone, who does posters for the theatres. Frank says he's very handsome and always has a fresh buttonhole every day."

"Aren't they late!"

The girls re-combed each other's hair and peered into a succession of looking-glasses. Sophie wore a dark green blouse and biscuit-coloured suit with hussar trimmings; Tessie had a plum-coloured jacket and mauve skirt, a wide-brimmed hat with banks of ribbons and gardenias.

They shared a quarter of boiled sweets as Sophie outlined Frank Toy's technical skills: "He makes the pictures and puts them in the thing. He's the most important person in the moving picture place."

Then they got their parasols and stood in the road as old Renie spoke to them through the front room window, reminding them that the boys were late.

Sophie and Tessie waited until four o'clock.

Then, leaving old Renie drinking a pot of strong tea as if she was an express train plunging through a station, they walked to the tram stop in Kennington High Road. The first person they met, looking floozyish and none too clean about the face,

was Chocolate Alice. "Hello, my dears." She seemed friendly, anxious to confide. "How are you? What you doing?"

Sophie asked if she'd seen Frank Toy.

"Or his friend?" Tessie added.

"Course I have. I just left them. Both."

"Where were they?"

"Down at the Snow Palace. There's a whole great crowd of junior club members waltzing there, dressed up nice, making themselves very pleasant. He certainly knows how to do himself up, Frank Toy does. Yellow gloves. Cane. Lovely overcoats he and his friend's got, although it's boiling hot, isn't it? Nice blue suits. They like to play the toff, don't they? Friend's got a flower in his coat."

Sophie turned redder and redder with temper. "Coo. Would you believe it?"

"Would you Adam and Eve it?" agreed Tessie. "But we don't mind really. Better out of it. Let's go and look at the yachts on the paddling pool."

It was almost six when Sophie, on her way home to help old Renie do the radishes, saw Frank on the other side of the road. He waved; she snapped her head away and marched on. She was annoyed to feel an angry tear in her eye because he was plainly not hurrying after her.

But when she stood inside her front door, she was amazed to hear Frank Toy's voice, raised but civil, inside the front room; then a burst of throaty laughter from old Renie and the beginnings of *My Song Goes Round the World* played very inaccurately by Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell, who owned an accordion. Frank had taken an astoundingly short cut; he was telling old Renie the plot of a comedy cinematograph show and she was guffawing with a mouth full of seed cake. Even Louie seemed amused and her father was pouring tea, a thing Sophie could not remember seeing him do before.

"Well, of all the blooming cheek," said Sophie harshly.

"Come in," called Frank.

"And hurry up and take off my hat and boots, girl; I'll want them later when your father takes me out."

Sophie moved to the small stool she generally used on formal occasions, pretending not to notice the plate of Mafeking biscuits Frank held out to her. All her four sisters had pink, pleased faces. The abandon of the yellow cups in the saucers said clearly that old Renie had begun to tell fortunes in the tea-leaves. It was like the party intended to take place the next night. That Frank Toy. She'd teach him to leave her waiting on the doorstep in the

sunshine. Not half, even if he poured out his quirky charm until his jaw dropped off.

Frank was looking down at her. He said, "Your father's bringing you all to the show some time next week, you and your sisters. I hope you'll think it's comfortable." She just stared at him.

" 'Ere," old Renie called, "remember to lay another place for the sit-down do tomorrow. Your Frank's coming to that and all. Your Dad's invited him."

"My Frank? He's nothing to do with me. I'm not going to any cinematograph shows, and if he comes to the party, then I'm not. Coo, dear! You think I want to be in the same cinematograph show as the fellow who lets me hang around half the night waiting to go tea-dancing, while he hangs about with a lot of drab sweetshop fancy ladies? No, thank you. Not likely."

"Sophie, do listen. I'm very sorry about this afternoon. I didn't think you really fancied going out. Then Ginger said he wasn't sure about keeping company with Tessie whatshername and I was in a proper fix, wasn't I? What was there to do? Look, please don't scowl. We'll have a grand night out next week. Bring Tessie too, if you like. Don't let's make it Tuesday because I've got to see a man about doing a course in optical printing, but how about Wednesday? Call for you in a cab. We'll do a really fancy music hall where you get refreshments. Please."

"Go on, go with him," said old Renie.

"Yes, don't be silly," Faith added, trying to look wise.

"Frank's a prime lad. Keeps us in fits." Everyone in the family was having a go. "Be a lady and talk to him," her father said.

Every eye in the room was turned on Sophie. It was the kind of crisis which could only be broken by separate conversations. Besides, she could have no tea or cake until everything was pleasant once more, so she gave a reluctant smile which brightened into a pretty one; said, "Right-oh, Mister Toy; but don't you do it again." Frank Toy grinned his symmetric grin and said he wouldn't.

The Skitterell parties were renowned. Relations from Brixton, Clapham South and Clapham Old Town, remote, monied uncles from Camberwell Green, cousins with small inns on the edge of Epping Forest, even a drably-dressed cousin who was rumoured to preach to gipsies, sat down to an immeasurably large meal in the front room: pie and brawn and cold potatoes, Bass, currant loaf, Mafeking biscuits, Dewar's whisky, port and lemon, walnuts and dishes of mixed fruit drops. People brought their own music with their names written on the covers. There would be

dancing with a pump-handle action; games. Then the guests usually fell asleep in the armchairs to be woken at seven by old Renie, carrying brushes and shovels to do out the grate.

Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell strained at beer stoppers, carved great portions of everything, when he wasn't swallowing whisky with his ebullient gurgle. On a low, wooden-armed chair sat Louie, her club foot concealed by a mauve dress; and there was a natural drift of old aunties with complaints to that end of the room around her: a fascinated puddle of women who for furs wore uncured lynx. They spoke of bunions, dried skin from warts.

Old Renie seemed always to be stirring up a tremendous bowl of wine punch, except when she ran to the middle of the floor and did the spoons on her arm and her knee as her brother Alfred played her husband's accordion. After old Renie had made more beef sandwiches she came back to do the spoons once more. It was amazing how they rapped and rattled over her black dress. There was a blue drift of cigar smoke in the room, and a nice smell of bay rum and new pickles.

Sophie and Frank Toy stood together by the dresser where Frank picked each of Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell's hats out of its box and examined it admiringly, saying Sophie's father was a toff, a real swell. Sophie, encouraged by tastes of his pale ale, had taken his arm. "Bit of a swell yourself," she told him.

Old Renie bawled across at them. "Come on, Soph'! Come on, young Frank! Enjoy yourselves. It's later than you think. Whoo-hoo!"

Uncles, aunts, cousins, a neighbour or so, embracing, eating, mimed their belches. Glistening waistcoats. Glistening tops of heads.

"You're a very serious boy in a way," Sophie said, withdrawing herself from Frank's expert though biscuit-tasting kiss against a framed sign reading "What Think Ye of Christ? He is Altogether Lovely" in the dining room, some minutes afterwards. No-one ever went into the dining room.

"Serious. Mm, yes, exactly. I am. No, I'd say it was more that I was dedicated."

"How do you mean?"

"I want to get up to the top of my profession, that's what I mean."

"But, Frank, you've got ever such a good position. I mean, not many fellows put the cinematograph on. Not many boys has as many nice suits as you."

"No, no, no, no, you don't understand. There's going to be no

stopping the progress of this moving picture business. Look at what they do in America—whole battles involving fifty or more people at once. And I met a man the other night who knows someone who's in at the start of a firm which will make moving pictures to take the place of newspapers. Reels of news instead of made-up stories. I want to have a go at that. I want to work one of them cameras, that's what I mean. Do you see?"

It seemed a good moment to continue cuddling. Then Sophie broke away, exclaiming, "Surely that wasn't a firework I heard?"

"I could travel all over the world. Meet the Queen, shake hands with Mr. Asquith. No more of your projecting for seventeen bob a week and free bread and Bovril. That would be real money; an expense account."

He was wonderful. He was going to be a Cinematograph King.

Elizabeth put her head in at the door. "Oy, come on. Mum says everyone's got to come back and play consequences."

This they did to the accompaniment of screams of joy.

Frank Toy played up but managed to warm to his monologue too. "I'll really be someone in the cinematograph, you wait!"

He was going to be a Cinematograph King. What would Stupid Smith, at Nantell Gluckstein, think of that?

No-one bothered to light the lamps. Then old Skitterell called for quiet. "I got a surprise, a new game." He took another box from behind the old copies of *Hilda's Home Help* and the hat-boxes under the dresser. He put his hand into something dramatically and drew out the largest motor car headlamp the assembled company had ever laid eyes on.

Everyone paid attention; even old Renie, who was explaining how, to make the brawn, she had used hand of pork *and* salt belly of pork.

Harold Francis Filmer Skitterell struck a match, lit the lamp and then, in the darkened front room, he threw a yellow beam on to the expanse of wall next to the door; a patch of wall bare except for the daguerreotype of old Renie's mother, old Theresa, on an independent little shelf.

Telling them to look, he composed his fingers and threw up on the lighted wall the silhouette of a marvellous kangaroo.

There was a ripple of sheerest delight in the hot room. Everyone wanted a turn. Old Renie wrinkled and cracked her arthritic fingers to send a shapeless nothing after the kangaroo. " 'Ere, I'm all fingers and thumbs. Look a'that."

"What's that?" the guests screamed.

"Tiger."

"Garn, that's no tiger. It looks more like a flounder to me."

"Saucy hound."

"Now Elizabeth."

"What's that, a monkey?"

"Yes," Elizabeth called, although it was to have been a goose.

"I can't get me fingers how I want them."

"Just you wait until Frank does one," Sophie whispered to Faith as other grey mutations appeared on the wall. "Wait till you see the one Frank does." Sophie could not begin to imagine what strange, terrible, yet beautiful animal a prospective Cinematograph King would create with his fingers on the wall. A bird of paradise? A hundred herons?

The entire room seemed impatient with the remaining animals. They sensed that a *tour de force* must come from Frank Toy. Crikey, thought Sophie. She was walking out with him.

"Now, Frank, do it."

"Come along, Frank boy."

"Go on, Frank." The cry was adopted by twenty guests tinted with India Pale Ale.

Frank spoke. "Is it my go?"

"Do us a magnificent one, Frank."

"I don't think it is my go."

Sophie was astounded to see Frank Toy looking rather worried. He flexed his fingers, held them up. The room fell as silent as the tea party on the afternoon they buried Uncle Jacob Skitterell. There was utter quiet.

Not one sound.

Then a worried outline grew on the wall, weaving and struggling like people in close combat; a thumb got up as if to make a speech, then it sank down and the shape resolved itself. Into the shape of two hands with the fingers locked; clearly, the hands of a man who could not make animals with his fingers and, furthermore, would never, ever learn.

No Cinematograph King at all.

"Eh, just a minute. I wasn't quite ready at the time." Frank sounded desperate but seemed to know it was too late to make amends. A further shape jumped up the wall but this was only one hand with the knuckles in a wavy line.

Old Renie's voice sang out, doing the last little bit to kill Frank and Sophie's romance as cold as old pease pudding.

"Huh. I don't think much of 'im. Not the kind of turn I like."

And Sophie, very shortly afterwards, married George from the tram office, who didn't have a dry way of saying things but was a wonder on the mandolin.

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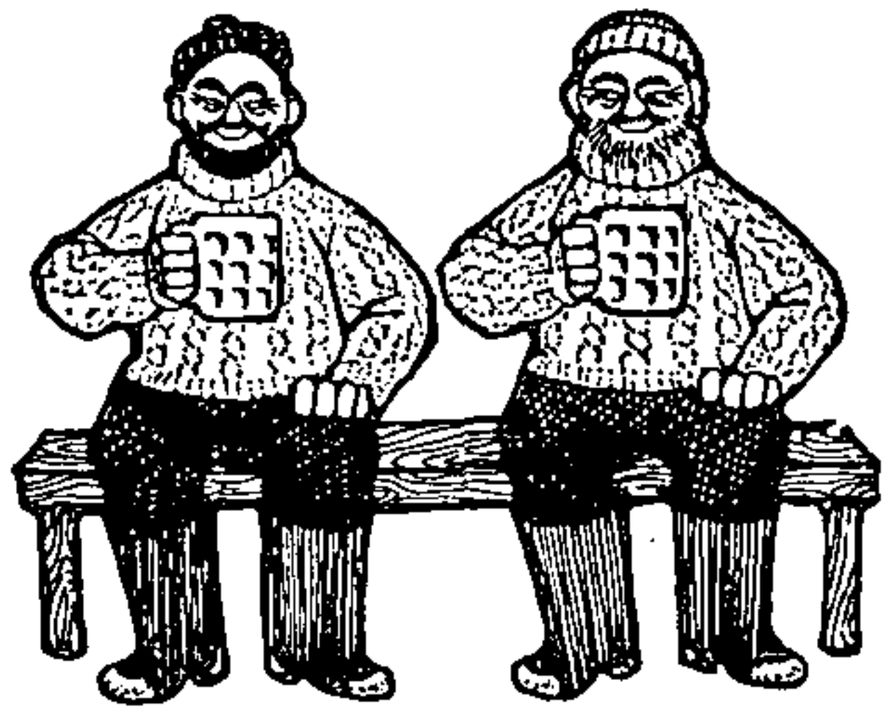
Age of Sail



A poser for readers who enjoy wrestling with number problems. The solution is on page 153.

Crossing the Atlantic in small boats is now so commonplace that when Ben and his son Richard made their landfall the event caused not the slightest flurry. The seafarers took up moorings a couple of miles upstream from the mouth of the river, and after making everything shipshape aboard their craft they went ashore for a drink.

All they wanted was to savour the taste of beer drawn from the wood, and to feel the rolling of the solid ground beneath their feet. Had it not been for a couple of holiday-makers, resplendent in Bermuda shorts and fancy shirts, the seafarers would have had their wish. As it was, their tale was dragged out of them. They suffered their companions with some patience, until at last they felt they had had enough.

"And how old are the two of you, then?" asked one of the Bermuda shorts.

Old Ben looked the holiday-makers up and down. No sailors, these, he thought. "Well now, I'm afraid the salt air has muddled my memory a bit. All I can remember for sure is that our combined ages come to the number of square feet of canvas that brought us across the ocean."

Richard grinned into the secrecy of his beard. "Oh come now, Dad," he said. "You know quite well that in ten years' time I'll be as old as you were when you were twice as old as I was."

The holiday-makers had had enough by this time, and beat a retreat. The younger of them, however, took the trouble to ask a local boatman what area of canvas the adventurers' vessel carried. Given that the answer was a hundred and twenty-five square feet, can *you* determine the ages of Ben and Richard?

Set by Nicholas Scripture

WITHERINGTON'S ISLAND

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO SOLVE A TOPSY-TURVY CRISIS

by RONALD KAY

WITHERINGTON'S Island is something of an embarrassment to Her Majesty's Government. In appearance it is much like any other tropical island. There are palm trees, beaches, coral reefs, and lagoons, even a semi-extinct volcano. Tasman encircled it, Cook avoided it, and Captain Bligh, blown off course by a hurricane, nearly ran into it. Annexed by a German naval commander in the name of the Kaiser, it became a British Protectorate after the First World War. Two Union Jacks, three unframed photographs of King George V, and seventeen B-Type filing cabinets were consigned to the island, but due to a misunderstanding between the Foreign and Colonial Offices no-one arrived to administer it. It was not until 1933 that a Protector arrived in the remarkable shape of J. S. Witherington Esquire.

His first twenty-five years in office were uneventful. The pattern of village life revolved around the annual planting of the crops, fish-drives, house-thatching, births, deaths and feast days. Over all this Witherington presided, with neither interference nor assistance from the outside world. Then, one day, a backbencher, idly checking off the few remaining red dots on the map, found an unexpected question for the House. "Why had no date for Independence been fixed for this island?" Witherington was instructed by the House of Commons to fix one.

"Regret to inform you I am under house arrest," radioed Witherington some weeks later, using an old R/T transmitter.

"Damn fool," observed the Under-Secretary of State, dispatching a naval sloop from Singapore to the island. With her

sailed Mr. Justice Crickley, a precise man whose lips seldom parted in jest.

"Typical Government policy," he complained to the ship's captain. "Appoint a judge to resolve an administrative crisis."

"What's gone wrong out there?" the captain inquired.

"Usual thing," replied the judge, "Fuddy-duddy administrator. Living in the past. Islanders' patience exhausted. Should have been granted independence long ago."

The sloop anchored off Witherington's island upon the evening of the third day. The tribal elders, in tapa and warpaint, gathered on the quay.

"What have you done with Mr. Witherington?" interrogated Mr. Justice Crickley through an interpreter.

The elders were most apologetic. "Our people became very angry," their spokesman explained, "we were obliged to imprison Witherington Sahib in his bungalow."

After some argument the captain conceded that the judge might proceed ashore alone. "Mine is a one-man mission of conciliation," the judge had insisted. "A show of force would wreck my chances of success."

Sullen islanders muttered at the doors of their thatched huts as the judge stalked by. "What building was this?" he demanded, indicating a charred ruin in the centre of the village.

"That was the office of Witherington Sahib," rejoined the guide solemnly.

Witherington resided in a sprawling wooden structure, on top of the adjoining hill. Two warriors with sharp eyes and spears stood guard on the veranda.

"Come right up," called a very English voice over the balustrade. "I'm just dusting the termites off King's College Chapel."

At the top of the stairs a tall disjointed figure with a wild thatch of hair was sitting on a stepladder, dusting an old print.

"Being housebound's enabling me to do my spring cleaning," beamed Witherington, gripping the dank hand of Mr. Justice Crickley with painful energy. "Fortunately you've arrived just at my breaking-off time."

Witherington stood up to his full six feet four inches, put on a tattered golfing blazer over his baggy drill-shorts, and led his guest on to the patio at the back of the house.

"An awkward thing, the whisky bottle," he murmured, uncorking a new one. "Too much for one, but not enough for two."

Crickley extracted a thin gold watch from his black alpaca jacket. "I've allocated myself exactly twenty-four hours to resolve the chaos into which you seem to have plunged the island,"

he announced. "I suggest we get down to work immediately."

Witherington stroked his beaky nose. "We'd better call a tribal meeting after dinner," he agreed.

He summoned one of his captors from outside the house. "Ask the elders to call a public meeting in the village clearing," he directed, speaking in fluent vernacular. The warrior bowed.

"Sorry we can't hold the meeting indoors," Witherington apologised. "You probably noticed that my office has been burnt down. Happened in the riot. Not that it was any loss. Front used to fall down every time I fired a cannon on Royal Birthdays."

The judge made an irascible note in his diary. "Perhaps you'd explain where the trouble started?" he snapped.

"At the meeting I called to announce that the island would be granted independence," Witherington recalled.

"What date did you fix for independence?" persisted Crickley.

"I didn't get that far," Witherington replied. Crickley winced.

"Well, there's certainly a lot of feeling against you in the village today," he warned. "I sensed the greatest hostility when I walked through." He turned a pallid ear towards the open window. "*Do they usually beat their wretched drums so loudly?*"

"Only when they're out for blood," said Witherington.

Crickley moistened his tongue with a sip of barley water. "What are they likely to do if they get out of hand again?"

"Club us, I expect," smiled Witherington. "Are you standard size by the way?" He helped himself to another whisky. "Colonial Office Regulations insist that a couple of standard coffins are always kept in stock for emergencies. I believe it can be rather undignified if you don't happen to fit."

Mr. Justice Crickley withdrew to the bathroom.

"Dinner is served," called his host after a decent interval. Witherington was lying full-length on a charpoy alongside the dining-table when the judge rejoined him. "Always eat lying on my left side," he said. "Relaxes the intestinal system."

Conversation during the meal was strained. "I assume the news has reached you," rasped the judge, over soup, "that the Colonial Office is on its way out?"

Witherington nodded sadly. "Along with all the old Colonial Characters I'm afraid," he affirmed. "I remember at my first Government House dinner party—North Borneo, I think it was—my colleague Tuffy Harbottle arrived late on his bicycle. Rode up to his empty place, drained a flower vase of water with the words 'Splendid vintage!', then pedalled off into the night again. The idea was to be certified troppo and sent home, passage

paid. Didn't work, though. Tuffy got promoted to Governor in the West Indies."

Crickley was not listening. His attention was on the warrior ranks down below under the palm trees. Their powerful bodies glistened with oil. Weapons flashed in the moonlight. "Hadn't we better get down there?" he urged.

"I never rush a meal," Witherington protested. "Get a terrible build-up of wind if I do."

Crickley stood up. "I intend to address the islanders at once!" he snorted.

Witherington was obliged to follow him to the village square, hiccupping gently.

"Gentlemen," the judge began, the opening formalities completed, "I have been sent by the British Government with full authority to accede to the popular demand."

Encouraging smiles greeted this announcement as it was translated.

"No doubt," he continued, with a disparaging glance at Witherington in the chair beside him, "when your Administrator first addressed you on the subject, you feared procrastination on his part." The interpreter struggled vainly over "procrastination". "It is my privilege, however," the judge proceeded, "to promise you independence as soon as it can be arranged. Say the year after next?"

The crowd roared its disapproval. The speaker checked himself. He had been about to force a bleak smile. "Very well, very well," he soothed, "let us say next year!"

Screams of rage. Brandishing of warclubs.

"Immediate independence then," shouted the judge in desperation. "You can have immediate independence."

Within seconds he and Witherington were surrounded by the maddened throng. "For God's sake, Witherington," implored Crickley, "what *do* they want?"

Witherington was still seated in his chair. He put his hand to his ear. "Afraid I can't hear what you're saying," he called, "got this blasted humming in my ears. Doctors say it's because my mother always took up the 'cello during pregnancy."

The judge wiped his streaming brow. "Our only hope now is the Navy," he cried.

"Did you mention the Navy?" asked Witherington brightly. "My uncle was in the Navy, you know. Died in it." He pulled reflectively on his pipe. "Yes, indeed. Uncle Basil expired, memorably, on the poop of a sloop in the bay of Bengal."

"To hell with Uncle Basil and all your other idiot ramblings!"

shouted Crickley. "Something drastic's going to happen if you—"

At that moment the dais upon which they were all sitting collapsed. "Ah, that's better," proclaimed Witherington, picking himself up from the debris. "The jolt seems to have cleared the ear-drums." He turned to the judge. "Now what exactly have you said so far in your speech?"

"I've promised them immediate independence," sobbed the judge. "What more can I do?"

"But that's just the point," answered Witherington. "They don't want independence!"

"Don't want independence?" repeated Crickley slowly. Fortunately the interpreter overheard these words and bellowed them back to the crowd. The uproar began to subside.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you."

Gently prodded by the nearest spear, His Lordship gathered himself together. "Well, gentlemen," he began again, speaking like a man in a trance, "if you don't want independence, I suppose you don't have to have it." This statement aroused grunts of approval. "It is, as you know," he proceeded, "the usual policy of Her Majesty's Government to grant independence to Colonial territories." Savage mutterings broke out once more. Crickley raised his hand. "But this need on no account be done in your case." Tumultuous applause.

The judge beckoned the interpreter. "I'd like to consult the elders upon one point," he told him. The elders clustered forward. "What sort of a man have you in mind as your future Island Administrator?" he wanted to know.

"The Witherington Sahib," they replied in deep-throated unison. Their spokesman added a word of explanation. "It was so as not to lose the Witherington Sahib that we keep him prisoner. He is our father, our mother, our sister, our brother, our son—"

"I think I've taken your point," said the judge, as he got up to leave. He bade Witherington a curt farewell. "I shall look rather foolish I must say," he grumbled, "with nothing to recommend to London after all this trouble and expense." He moved off towards the wharf where the naval cutter was already waiting.

"Witherington Sahib gonna stay here all his life," declaimed the beaming village spokesman. "All his life!"

The crowd took up the chant, calypso-style.

"In that case," Witherington called out to the retreating judge, "there is one thing you can recommend to London."

"What's that?" asked Crickley wearily.

"Tell them to send out a large-size coffin—say in about forty years' time."

© Ronald Kay 1967

THE sun had slipped over the far crest of the ravine. Shadows were filling the valley, and the leaping river had turned from icy green to a cruel luminous black. Although Warren Harley wanted to get to Srinagar that evening, he didn't like the thought of driving at night. For the next twenty miles the road climbed in corkscrew spirals, a drop of thousands of feet on one side, ungiving rock on the other.

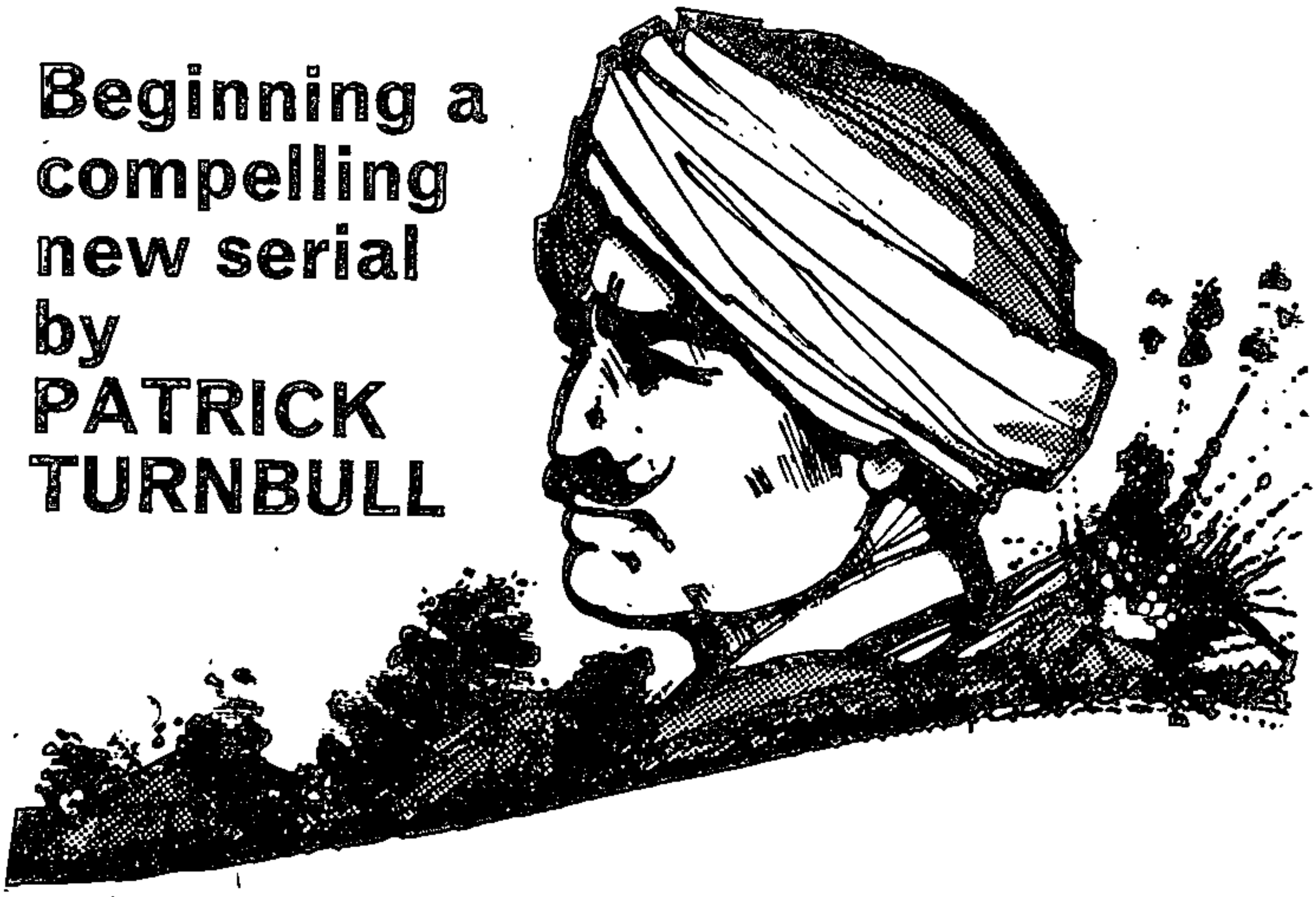
Gopal, the driver, had stopped the taxi at the bottom of the short drive up to the Banihal dak bungalow. He turned to Warren Harley hopefully.

"Very comfortable, sir. Many tourists stay here."

It looked inviting. There were two wicker chairs on

A PATTERN OF DARK HANDS

Beginning a compelling new serial by PATRICK TURNBULL



the veranda. The sight of them made Warren realise how much he ached, and how tired he was. The last hundred miles had been an unending succession of rough corners, bucketing him like a Channel crossing while dust swept up through the floor boards. A few hours couldn't really make any difference.

"All right," he said. "But we must make an early morning start."

He breathed in the cool mountain air appreciatively. With the thermometer well over the hundred mark in the shade, the drive across the plains from Amritsar to Jammu had been murderous. It was like driving through an oven. It was too hot to sweat; he was shrivelled. By the time they reached the first green valleys of the foothills, his lips were cracked, his tongue dry and swollen.

When he passed a bullock cart creaking along the road, wrapped like a corpse in its pall of red dust, a village of baked-mud, dung-plastered huts, he tried to comfort himself with the thought that he was on his way to mountain coolness while others were condemned to grill through the long summer.

There were irritating delays in Jammu. On the outskirts, armoured cars and tanks were dispersed in an orchard. The town itself was filled with troops. On entering, and again before leaving, Warren's passport was scrutinised as though it were suspected of carrying a secret code.

The car was stripped down, Gopal protesting loudly, while suitcases and bedding rolls were searched four times by an official, who seemed extremely unwilling to believe that they were not attempting to smuggle beef over the frontier. When, for the third time, he denied that he possessed any firearms, he had an uncomfortable vision of himself in a cell in Jammu gaol, certain that the shoulder holster must be making an obvious bulge under his shirt.

If it hadn't been for these delays they might have been in Srinagar, or at least over the pass. It was pleasant on the veranda, though; the cold bite of the approaching night air exciting. When the bearded khansama, an old hillman who'd remembered a little English, told him that dinner of "soup; mutton and pudding" would be ready in an hour, Warren said, "Fine! The sooner the better."

A bathroom opened off the bedroom, the bath, a zinc tub, in the far corner. A sharp breeze was whipping through a hole at the foot of the wall which served as a drain, as the Kashmiri boy filled the tub with hot water from two fire-blackened petrol tins.

Before undressing, Warren Harley locked both the bedroom and bathroom doors, and latched the shutters over the windows.

After taking off his shirt, he slipped the shoulder holster into a towel which he carried with him into the bathroom, putting it down on the floor within easy reach of the tub. He went through these movements as though they were part of a boring exercise whose utility he doubted. This made him feel slightly ridiculous; a little boy playing at James Bond. But Alfred Mannheim had impressed on him that he must be careful.

It was impossible to wallow in the bath as he would have liked to have done. In a few minutes the water was cold, and he began to shiver. He dressed quickly; grey flannels, sweater—almost impossible to believe that the previous evening he'd been limp with the heat in drill slacks and open-neck shirt.

There was still half an hour to go before the promised meal. It would be too chilly on the veranda. He got the bottle of Haig out of his bedding roll, and settled down to read *The Statesman*, full of inflammatory articles about Pakistan's attitude over Kashmir. He was about half-way through one particularly vituperative attack suggesting that the "Pakistan viper" should be "crushed, by force of arms if necessary", when he heard a car drive up.

Wondering if it would prove to be a fellow journalist—he was beginning to get used to calling himself a journalist at last—and determined, if it should be, not to get too involved in possibly embarrassing conversation, he went over to fill up his glass with water and, suddenly, found himself staring at his image in the fly-blown mirror on the dressing table.

Not a bad image. And so typically British. Darkish, straw-coloured hair, thick but straight, cut old-fashionedly short. Blue eyes, set in an oval face rounded off by an aggressive chin, untroubled by five o'clock shadow even though it was thirty-six hours since he had shaved. Six feet two inches, so well-proportioned that he didn't give the impression of being tall.

He grinned at himself. Sturdy Anglo-Saxon stock, going back to Magna Carta, one might have said. And his grandmother's pure Hindu blood? Would it make itself shown in future generations? No point in letting it worry him too much, he thought, as he settled down to the paper again. There might not be any future generations.

Thirty-five minutes later, Warren locked his bedroom door and walked down the veranda to the dining room. There was a log fire blazing, and the atmosphere was warm and comfortable. A kitmutgar, in off-white, who could have stepped straight from a late-nineteenth century print, held his chair for him.

As he was settling down and unfolding his table napkin, he

noticed the girl. It was a shock. When he heard the car drive up, he took it for granted that the traveller would be a journalist or a European tourist. Certainly—though he couldn't have said why—a male.

The girl sitting at a table to his left was Indian; young and pretty. India, he knew, had changed radically from his grandfather's time, but he was surprised to see that the girl was apparently alone, and he was still more surprised when she looked up, meeting his gaze, and said, "Good evening."

He answered, "Good evening," as the kitmutgar put the soup tureen on the table. The soup was boiling hot and well laced with curry powder. Warren attacked it hungrily but kept shooting glances, not too obvious he hoped, at the girl who was being waited on by an elderly man who, he imagined, was her own servant.

He'd made up his mind before leaving England that he wasn't going to fall for any "glamour of the East" nonsense, but grudgingly he had to admit that she was rather more than just pretty. Her sari was a dawn rose, and on her shoulders her tide of jet-black hair swept down in tumbling waves. Her eyes, black as her hair, were enormous, exaggerated by the ochre "tika" mark low on her forehead. Once she caught his gaze and smiled, full lips parting to show even white teeth.

Warren Harley liked women. Particularly blonde women—on principle. In an odd way dark women frightened him because, sometimes, of an atavism which he meant to fight: before he had time to think he found himself attracted by them, then hating them and himself.

In this case, though, it might be useful to know a "native", especially if she were from Srinagar. He might even mention, if it would help, his own blood ties with the country, but only if it would help. There was no emotional risk, even though the girl was attractive; like a delicate flower in the folds of her sari. She was Indian, and he'd got a job to do.

"Excuse me," he said, "I don't know if you'd care for a cup of coffee, but if you would, I've got some instant coffee with me, and we could probably persuade the khansama to let us have some boiling water."

She didn't seem at all surprised that he'd spoken to her. She said, "Thank you. I'd love some coffee."

Warren liked the tone of her voice. It was soft, almost singsong, but without hint of music hall chi-chi accent.

"I'll go and get it," he said. "We'd better have it here. I think it would be too cold on the veranda."

"Don't grumble if it is a little cold tonight," she laughed. "You'll be warm enough tomorrow night in Srinagar, if that's where you're going."

"I am," he said. "And you?"

"Yes. I've got relations, an uncle, in Srinagar."

"I won't be a moment," he said, then added, "Oh, by the way —Harley's my name. Warren Harley."

He held out his hand.

"Chandra," she said. "Chandra Naranjan."

Her hand, he noticed, was tiny; the fingers long and slender.

"I must admit I was surprised to see you," said Warren, a few minutes later, sipping his coffee. "I don't know why, but when I heard your car drive up I was sure it was another tourist." For the moment, he avoided the word journalist. "Are you with a taxi, too?"

"No," she said. "I've got my own car."

"You mean you're alone?"

"I always drive myself," she said. "But I've got old Krishnan, the bearer, with me—he's been with the family since long before I was born—and a chauffeur who keeps the car going. I don't know anything about mechanics, and I should hate to have to change a tyre."

"Even so," he said, "isn't it a bit unusual?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, laughing, then added, "How long have you been in India?"

"Not very long. A couple of weeks or so."

"Well India's changed a bit since Kipling's time," she said, "and Mummy and Daddy are pretty go-ahead, in most ways."

"Most ways? You mean in some ways they aren't?"

He watched her carefully as she frowned, her eyes becoming sombre, darker than jet.

"Oh," she said, "it wouldn't make sense to you."

"It might do," he said. "I know I've really only just arrived in this country, and that everything has changed in the last few years, but I have a vague tie. My grandfather was in the old ICS."

She didn't answer, and he said, "If it's not being inquisitive, I'm very interested, and I feel like a drink. How would your parents react to your joining me in a whisky?"

"Daddy wouldn't mind," she said, "but Mummy was a friend of Ghandhiji. So she's a bit sticky about that sort of thing."

"Is that what you were talking about?"

She looked quickly up at him.

"No!" she said. "I don't see why I should bore you with my troubles; but as you asked—it's marriage."

"Marriage? You mean you're married?"

She laughed again, throwing up her hánds in mock horror.

"Heaven forbid, no! But you see I'm twenty-one, and Mummy and Daddy both think anyone who reaches the age of twenty-one and isn't married is a hopeless old maid. But I don't want to get married—yet. I'd have liked a career. I want to travel. But in my sort of family, girls don't have careers, and Mummy and Daddy hate travelling. There's another thing—" she hesitated "—it would be different if I were going to marry a European or an American, or even a more modern-minded Indian; but you see Mummy and Daddy have chosen my future husband for me, and—"

"You're engaged, then?"

"I suppose you'd call it that," she said, her eyes sparkling with anger. "But there is one thing. I refuse to agree to a date for the wedding. That's why I'm going to stay for a bit with my uncle. To get away from it all."

"And what," asked Warren, "does your fiancé say about it?"

"He's hopelessly old-fashioned," she said angrily. "But there's nothing he can do, or say, about it. Anyhow, he's a major in the army and he's just been sent off somewhere with his regiment and not allowed to say where."

"Why? This possible war everyone's talking about?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so."

"I find it all very puzzling," said Warren, leaning back in his chair. "On the one hand, your parents seem to be trying to force you into an arranged marriage, and yet, on the other, they let you run away from it, travelling over this rather dangerous road more or less alone. Especially when there seems to be a war over Kashmir just round the corner, it doesn't make sense."

"Nothing in India does," she said quickly, then yawned. "Sorry I've been boring you with my troubles. I must go to bed and leave you to your drink."

"You haven't been boring me," said Warren. "In fact, I was hoping there might be a chance of seeing you in Srinagar." He added, "We might think of a solution to your problem."

"I doubt that," she said, as she got up, "but I've an idea—"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you pay off your taxi and let me drive you?"

He was so surprised that just for a moment he was suspicious. It was instinctive, and for no concrete reason. He began to stammer, and she went on.

"You'd be doing me a great favour really. The road *is* dangerous. Gupta the chauffeur is all right, but I don't think he'd be much good in an emergency, and Krishnan's an old man. I should probably be stuck if anything went wrong."

"I couldn't send Gopal back," he said slowly, annoyed with himself at his suspicions. It was enough to sour the incredible luck that this meeting might turn out to be. "You see, he was the only taxi-driver in Amritsar who wasn't frightened to take a trip to Kashmir or who didn't demand a small fortune. But I'd like to ride with you. Gopal can follow. If there is a breakdown, he'd be useful."

They shook hands rather formally. Warren sat down again and called for a whisky. He drank it slowly, then went out on to the veranda.

It was very dark, but at the far end a jagged light threw a striped pattern on the ground. The light must be coming from Chandra's room. He caught his breath. It was as if he could see her hair flowing out in a dark flood over the whiteness of a pillow, her closed eyelids and long lashes. How *modern* was she apart from talk? Suppose he had gone with her when she left the dining room? Impatiently he lighted a cigarette. No point in complicating matters. Things were working out well. Threat of war and Chandra; two perfect excuses for a journalist—even a phoney one—and a man, to be in Srinagar.

Far below, the river muttered angrily, a threatening voice in the night. Beyond the short drive was the paler shadow formed by the road's narrow ribbon. Beyond that, inky blackness, for the road skirted the gorge, and a false step would mean a death plunge into the Chenab's bellowing waters. A solid rampart, the far side of the gorge, rose in sheer slopes high above the bungalow, jabbing at the night sky's lighter purple, mocking with the diamond brightness of the stars.

A breeze eddied along the veranda, chill from the far glaciers. Warren shivered, then found himself in total darkness. The light from Chandra's room had been put out.

Another drink, he thought, to keep the cold out, then bed. But he couldn't make up his mind to undress. He wanted to think.

IT had been three months, almost to the day, since Warren Harley had asked his boss for a long weekend.

"What is it this time?" demanded Alfred Mannheim, a comfortable figure in his late fifties. With his impeccable city suit, heavy, old-fashioned tortoiseshell glasses, he was exactly what

one would imagine a world-famous jeweller should look like. "More parachute jumps, or another climb up Snowdon?"

"Neither, sir," said Warren. "Underwater. Frogman trials."

"And you want to go off after Thursday lunch hour. A long weekend, as you say." Alfred Mannheim drummed his desk with his square finger tips. "And after all this, who's the enemy?"

Warren smiled. "I hadn't really thought about that," he said.

"But you will agree," said Alfred Mannheim, "that time spent in acquiring knowledge which is not to be put to some practical use is basically wasted."

"Theoretically, I suppose."

"Sit down," said Alfred Mannheim.

Astonished, Warren lowered himself into the club armchair reserved for clients. It was the first time in the three years he had worked for Mannheim that he had been asked to sit down.

"Anyhow," said Alfred Mannheim, "that is my theory, a practical and not a theoretical theory, I may say." He leaned forward. "Now you must admit that I've been very generous about allowing you to spend hours for which *I* pay you, jumping out of aeroplanes and running up and down mountains."

"I'm very grateful—"

"Let me do the talking, if you don't mind, and on what must be for you a fascinating subject: yourself. Your obvious desire to risk breaking your neck and your love of discomfort seem to indicate two things. First, you have a tough, resistant carcase. Second, you would not object to running certain risks in certain circumstances. Correct, Harley?"

"Correct, sir."

"Again, in spite of your preference for the open air life, the practical side of your nature tells you that, in spite of vastly improved pay, the services still don't offer a financial return compatible with your idea of a reasonable standard of living."

"Right again, sir," said Warren, wondering what this homily was leading to.

The question was shot at him. "What would you say to going to India? Kashmir, to be precise."

Warren was going to say, "Marvellous," or something like that, when he remembered that it didn't do to be over-enthusiastic. The old man despised naivety.

He said, "As a pleasure trip it sounds interesting. But I don't suppose that's what you had in mind. I'd like to know the details."

Alfred Mannheim nodded appreciatively.

"That's the sort of answer I like to hear," he said.

He called for his secretary, a girl in her early twenties, with a Scottish accent and the appearance of an advertisement for an expensive but thoroughly respectable toilet soap.

"No visitors or phone calls, Janet," said Alfred Mannheim. "Anything urgent, leave a message or come back after lunch."

"Right," he said, when they were alone again. "First of all, let me put you into the picture." He took a gun-metal cigarette case from his pocket. "We've always done a lot of business with Indian—shall I say 'potentates', for want of a better word. Before the war we used to sell them stones. Since the war, they've been trying to sell them back to us to get a little ready cash.

"We, of course, are perfectly willing to buy back, at our price, and then resell to the new-style potentates. You know the sort. Corporals yesterday, presidents or dictators today, millionaires—in sterling, of course—tomorrow, whose wives or girl friends invariably have a shrewd taste in diamonds. But at the moment the trouble with so many of the old-style potentates is the extreme difficulty they have in getting their assets out of their country. Do you follow me?"

"I think so," said Warren.

"Good! Now one of our best clients in the past, and would-be seller today, is a certain Pandit Moti Ram of Srinagar, Kashmir. Moti Ram isn't a prince, or even a distant relation of a maharajah. He's a businessman. He owns half the houseboats in Kashmir, a major interest in the hotels and the wood-carving and silk trades. In other words a sort of tourist empire. But the thing about Moti Ram was that, like Napoleon's mother, he was always asking himself how long it was all going to last . . ."

"So he bought diamonds?"

"In a big way. And circumstances have proved that his fears were justified. The tourist trade, with this permament threat of war over Kashmir between India and Pakistan, has more or less slumped. At the same time the Indian government has clamped down on any form of capital leaving the country. Moti Ram's diamond collecting has been common knowledge for years, so he hasn't a hope of smuggling anything out of the country himself. In fact, as he sees it, he can only do one of two things: stay on and risk having his throat cut when the fighting starts, in any case be ruined, or else leave the country, but penniless."

"Couldn't some third person get the diamonds out for him?"

"The only solution, of course, Harley. But who could he trust? Anyone in his family would be suspect. He couldn't possibly trust an outsider. Myself? One of our directors? The

trouble there is that we're all too old, too soft, to take the risks. In fact there's only one answer . . ."

"Yes?"

Alfred Mannheim smiled.

"You, Harley. If you're prepared to take it on."

"I'm tempted," said Warren. "And what about the pay? I imagine there would be, shall we say 'special' rates."

"Naturally. Expenses, generous expense account, and," he leaned forward again, "three per cent of the sale. I can promise you that that will mean a five-figure cheque. Another thing—"

"Yes?"

"I thought that sentiment might have some pull. I believe your grandfather had a distinguished career in the Indian Civil Service."

"I'll take the job on," said Warren abruptly.

He looked down at Janet's tight golden curls, and her fingers scurrying over the typewriter.

"If there's a call for the old man you can put it through now," he said.

"O.K.," she said, smiling.

He loved her complete blondness. With his mother he always felt embarrassed. India persisted in her blood, betrayed itself in her. When he married, it would be a girl like Janet, and suddenly he was asking himself. Why not Janet? Even today, you could make a start in life with a five-figure cheque in the bank.

WARREN undressed slowly and was just going to get into bed when the memory of Janet reproached him. It was a shock to realise that he had not given her a single thought since stepping out of the aeroplane at Delhi airport. And now, trying to force himself, he found that the picture of her was vague.

Of course she was cool, but wasn't that what he always said he wanted in a wife? He wasn't going to ruin himself, like his grandfather, for love. It must have been love, he supposed. And how long had it lasted? Really lasted? He refused to believe the stories about his grandfather and grandmother being perfectly happy in the retirement forced on them by their marriage. His grandfather certainly couldn't have been happy; only resigned. Wasn't that why he'd been Christened "Warren"; in memory of Warren Hastings, like his grandfather, martyred because of his attachment to India?

He didn't want that sort of love, so he wasn't disappointed by

Janet's coolness when she asked him up to her flat after he'd dined her, and they'd spent a couple of hours in a club off Wardour Street. She took it for granted that he'd make love to her, and that was all.

That was the way he wanted it, he kept telling himself. The sort of thing that would last because it was solid, and could not be broken because there was nothing breakable.

How quiet it was.

He wasn't used to such utter silence. He felt he had to go outside once more before trying to sleep, to assure himself of the infinite space in which the bungalow was perched like an immobile satellite.

Wrapping a blanket round his shoulders, he stepped on to the veranda. The cold cut into him, but the very loneliness of the world of towering shadows and the subterranean muttering of the river were strangely exciting. It was more than that. Restlessly he began to think of Chandra. For a few seconds he was tempted to walk quietly through the night and tap, gently, on her door.

"I'd better get to bed before I make a fool of myself," he muttered, half aloud, and had turned to go back to his room when he heard voices.

There was nothing peculiar about the voices in themselves. It was the sudden jar of the human voice, a foreign element, breaking in on those of the night, as the chowkidar, the night watchman, appeared at the far end of the veranda.

Warren recognised him by the long staff he was gripping in his right hand. The staff was part of his uniform. It was nearly two in the morning, so he must be an unusually conscientious chowkidar, thought Warren, watching curiously, hidden in the darkness of the door's arch. Chowkidars, Gopal had told him the previous evening which they'd spent in a rest house, carried long staffs and reported for duty at sunset. About half-past nine or ten, they would make a cursory tour of the building they were supposed to be guarding, and then spread their blankets in a corner of the veranda and snore till dawn.

Two men, so swathed in blankets that they had no definite form, and who had lowered their voices till they were now nothing but a barely audible murmur, were talking to the chowkidar whose back was now turned to Warren. They were probably the khansama and the kitmutgar, Warren thought; but why had they stayed up so late?

There was a pause in the conversation, and then one of the figures bent forward, thrusting something quickly into the

chowkidar's hand. Nothing more was said. The chowkidar stayed on the veranda, and the two men, heads bent, moved off down the hill.

For the first time, as he lay in bed, Warren Harley found the hard pressure of pistol and holster under the pillow companionable rather than ridiculous. It was the silence. It was so intense that he almost felt he must hold his breath.

Nothing, thought Warren unwillingly, as Chandra came into the dining room, a shimmer of blue and gold, was as attractive as a sari. He called out to her.

"You look as though you were going to a reception at the President's. You make me feel too scruffy to be given a lift."

"I always wear a sari," she said. "It's the only thing traditional I like. Did you sleep well?"

He wasn't sure whether she hadn't asked the question ironically, and he remembered the light on the veranda and his own restlessness.

"Not so well," he said casually. "I was cold and found the stillness getting on my nerves. What about you?"

"I read a bit," she said. "A translation of Sagan's latest book. But I put my light out quite early and didn't wake up till dawn."

"Do you enjoy Sagan?"

"Yes. I like all her books, and Marguerite Duras, and of course Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch. Naturally, if Rajindhra Singh —my fiancé so-called—had his way, I'd only be allowed to read Tagore or, better still, be asked to stick to embroidery." She added, "I wish I could read French books in thé original, but once I get to Europe it shouldn't take me very long to learn French."

He said, surprised, "I didn't know you were going to Europe. Are you going soon?"

"I don't know whether it will be soon," she said. "I only know that I am going."

As the bearer, Krishnan, poured out a cup of tea, she said, "I never eat any breakfast, so we can start in half an hour, if that would suit you."

The last suitcase was being crammed into the boot of Chandra's open Peugeot 404, when a Jeep came driving fast up the road from the Jammu direction; then swung up towards the bungalow, stopping opposite the veranda with a deliberately dramatic screech of brakes.

A Sikh lieutenant in green uniform, a net over his pagri, got out. He stared in a hostile manner at Warren and Chandra,

before barking in a parade-ground voice, "Where are you going?"

It was the first time anyone had been deliberately unfriendly. Warren's first reaction was to ignore the question or tell the lieutenant to mind his own business. Getting into an argument wouldn't help things, he reminded himself, especially as for some reason the lieutenant seemed to be in a quarrelsome mood. He answered quietly, "To Srinagar."

"You will have to wait at least an hour," said the Sikh, pulling up a chair for himself while an orderly shouted for the kitmutgar to bring tea. "A small convoy is going through."

As he spoke, the first truck packed with dust-smothered troops came rumbling round the corner.

"In case you didn't know it," he went on, "a state of emergency has been declared. Pakistan irregulars fired on two of our frontier posts during the night." He glared at Warren Harley. "And you! What is your business in Srinagar?"

Warren was glad that he'd always made a point of practising self-control. "I'm a journalist," he said. ("We'll have 'journalist' marked against 'Profession' on your passport," Alfred Mannheim had insisted.)

"What paper are you accredited to?"

"Free-lance."

"I see."

The Sikh paused to drink down a cup of steaming tea in one gulp, then rounded on Chandra.

"And you? I suppose you too are a journalist." He managed to make the word sound thoroughly offensive.

Warren guessed that Chandra was frightened as well as angry, but her voice was quite steady when she said, "I am not. I'm going to Srinagar to visit my uncle." More confident, she added with a careful nonchalance, "You may have heard of him—Pandit Moti Ram."

Again Warren was glad that he could always keep a poker face. He was impressed by the way the Sikh's attitude changed.

"Of course I have heard of him," he said, almost affably, "and I must apologise for this delay. But you must really blame the Pakistanis."

He drank another two cups of tea, and then stood up.

"Well! I must be on my way."

Suddenly his eyes were unfriendly again as he said casually to Chandra, "Are you Miss Naranjan, by any chance?"

"I am."

The lieutenant smiled frigidly.

"Major Rajindhra Singh was one of my instructors at the Military Academy. I may be seeing him in the near future. I should be pleased to convey your greetings, Miss Naranjan, and yours too, Mr. —?"

"Harley!" said Warren. "But there would be no point in sending my greetings. I have not had the pleasure of meeting the major."

Saluting perfunctorily, the lieutenant walked briskly over to the Jeep, calling over his shoulder, "Wait half an hour after the last truck has gone through. Time to let the dust settle."

"I don't think he liked me," said Warren, as the Jeep drove off.

"Oh," said Chandra angrily, "Sikhs are like that. So bossy and pleased with themselves. But it was a good thing you didn't start arguing with him. He'd have had you put under arrest."

"But mention of your uncle's name helped," Warren said quickly.

"Oh, everybody's heard of Pandit Moti Ram. You see he's very rich. I suppose now that the maharajahs are all poor, he's one of the richest men in India. You'll meet him, of course. He's very sweet and old-fashioned, and loves the British."

Warren laughed.

"Is loving the British considered a sign of eccentricity?"

"In India today," said Chandra, "we judge people as individuals. But Uncle's still under the spell of the British Raj. He doesn't talk about the 'good old days', but he'd like to."

As soon as they turned off from the bungalow, the road began to climb. Ahead, stones marking its outer edge, it swept up like a staircase till the traces vanished, apparently into a sheer cliff face. On the far side of the gorge, ridge after granite ridge rose to a towering crest, so that Warren had the feeling that they were clambering slowly from a profound well towards the sky, a brilliant cloudless blue. Though the early morning sun's rays were slanting on to them, the air was fresh. Difficult to believe that the plains' killing heat was other than a nightmare.

Chandra drove a little recklessly, anxious to show off her skill. Warren found himself straining his leg muscles, pressing down on non-existent controls, when they swung out round hairpin bends; and he had the feeling that the car was suspended by an invisible thread over the void.

Could there be an end to this, he found himself asking, as each bend only revealed a further vista of upcurling bends? Or was there no summit to the pass? Would Eternity be spent climbing up and up into an ever paler blue, the slowly growing chill baffling the sun's efforts?

There was a milestone, stark on a blind corner. They were, Warren noted, 83 miles from Srinagar, and at an altitude of 8935 feet. He was trying to imagine what it would feel like to fall 8935 feet as the tyres screeched round the corner, when

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suddenly, just ahead in the solid rock face, was the wall-eyed entrance of a tunnel.

"Most people think it's worth stopping here a minute or two," said Chandra as they came out into the light of the far side.

They stood by the road's edge. Warren knew that he ought to say something. He couldn't. All his life, the word "country" had meant a pleasant stretch of downs or moors, comparatively few houses in sight; a meandering trout stream. Or else Snowdonia's steep, misty, but small slopes where he sweated during the Special Air Service weekend exercises. A change from the mile after mile of pavements, semi-detacheds and concrete blocks which one sensed, nevertheless, were just round the corner.

Now, awed by the sheer vastness—and he could not understand why—he was frightened; certainly uneasy. It was as though he was being drawn irresistibly by a secret vice against which, unconsciously perhaps, he had been fighting all his life.

Under his breath, as the beauty of it hurt him, he said, "It's too beautiful."

He let his eyes move slowly round the circle of snow crests, broken by glittering giants whose peaks seemed to float like islands in a heavenly ocean. Then, dizzily, he looked down as, from his feet, the road curved sensually down to lose itself in the emerald green that was the Vale of Kashmir, streaked and splashed haphazard by ribboning streams, rivers and lakes.

"It's too much," he muttered again, and to himself: "I'm not going to let this damn country get into my blood; any more than it is already."

"Very attractive," he said frigidly. "But I think we'd better be moving."

He could see that she took the remark almost as a personal slight. There was a stab of anger in her eyes. Racing the engine, she let the clutch out with a jerk. The Peugeot jumped like a kicked pariah. Her foot hard down on the accelerator, she swung the car viciously round the first corners.

"Could we go a bit slower?" Warren said. "You frighten me."

"I thought you were in a hurry," she snapped. Then suddenly she laughed and slowed down.

It was then that he heard Gopal's klaxon shrieking.

Twisting to look back over his shoulder, Warren saw the big Chevrolet zig-zagging madly, and Gopal's eyes staring wildly through the dust-smeared windscreen. His mouth was wide open. Both hands clawed at the wheel as if it were a living thing.

Suddenly the car lurched over to the right. There was a tearing sound as the off wing buckled, then was bent up like cardboard, while the outer wheel, scraping against the rock wall, brought the battered mass to an agonised halt.

Warren shouted, "Pull up! For God's sake, pull up!"

The Peugeot was still moving as he jumped. He fell, grazing his knees, then sprinted up the road. Shakily, Gopal climbed out, his

face a sickly ash-grey. Big beads of sweat splashed down over his forehead into his eyes.

"If the wheels had turned the other way," he said, lips quivering, "there was no saving me."

Warren didn't have to look over the edge. How long would it have taken, trapped in the car, to fall three or four thousand feet?

"What happened?"

"Was awful," said Gopal, dabbing at his forehead. "As soon as starting down hill, brakes not working. I step on brake and brake does not respond. Then suddenly I am turning corner and wheel is not steering." He made a despairing gesture in the air with his hands, repeating, "If wheels had turned other way!"

"Have you had the car overhauled lately?" asked Warren.

"Am very careful fellow," said Gopal. "Before long journey am always putting car in garage."

"And yesterday she was O.K.?"

"Was O.K. this morning. Of course am not using brakes uphill."

"And the steering?"

"It was also O.K. Only after going fast after two, three corner, steering wheel not steering."

Warren was surprised to see that Chandra had not bothered to get out. There was something irritating about her composure.

"A question of even chances," he said grimly. "If the wheels had locked to the left instead of to the right, we'd have had a corpse on our hands. And if it hadn't been for your idea of my riding with you, it would have been two."

"It is a dangerous road," said Chandra vaguely.

And when Warren called to Gopal to get in the back of the Peugeot, she said, "Do we really have to give him a lift? He stinks of betel and garlic."

They drove slowly. Even when they reached the valley, and the poplar-lined road stretched long and straight ahead of them, she kept the speedometer below forty-five. Soothed by the sun's warmth, the quiet, and the loneliness, Warren found that he was dismissing the accident from his mind, as if Chandra's indifference were catching.

At Qazi Gand, 44 miles from Srinagar, Chandra turned off the road to the dak bungalow.

"I'm hungry and thirsty," she said. "Let's have tiffin here."

"You know," said Warren a few minutes later, when they had settled in the veranda's wicker chairs, "I can't get over you being so calm about the accident."

Her eyes were tranquil. Curled in the chair, she might have been a figure in an ancient Iranian painting. Was she really so tough, in spite of such a fragile appearance, or was she, as he flattered himself he was, a good actor?

"You realise how serious it could have been?" he insisted.

"Of course I do."

There was a slight irritable shrug of her shoulders, but he went on.

"It's a miracle Gopal wasn't killed."

"Yes, I know that," she said almost sharply, "but—"

"But what?"

She smiled, spreading out her slender fingers deprecatingly.

"Well—I mean—after all, he *is* only a taxi driver." The smile faded. Sulkily, as though repeating a lesson, or a parrot-fashion-learnt slogan, she went on, "India has too many mouths to feed. A taxi driver doesn't make any useful contribution to society."

Warren let the remark pass. He wasn't in a mood to argue, but again he felt a sudden chill at the base of his spine, picturing himself helpless in the Chevrolet as it swayed across the narrow road in a death ballet between the drop and the rock face. And what would Chandra have done if he had gone over? Shrugged her shoulders, probably, and driven on. It was difficult to reconcile such lack of sentimentality with such idyllic surroundings.

He ordered lunch—"soup, mutton, and pudding"—then, excusing himself, wandered round to the back of the bungalow.

A bare hour's driving now separated him from the end of the long journey. It was an incredible piece of luck that Chandra should be Moti Ram's niece. Obviously, the more he was seen with her the more excuse there was for calling at the house.

Alfred Mannheim had warned him not to be in a hurry. Word would be sent to Moti Ram to expect him—Alfred Mannheim refused to say how. But Warren was to use his "initiative and ingenuity" to make the meeting seem an accident, always bearing in mind that Moti Ram was probably being watched; not only by the police, since exporting capital was a serious crime, but also by his jealous neighbours.

Outside the khansama's hut, Gopal was squatting on his haunches talking to Krishnan and Gupta. One of life's reprieves, thought Warren. So easily that individual, talking animatedly, could have been a battered mass of torn and broken flesh and bones; vulture feed. But how had it happened?

He took a few more paces, then stopped.

There was no proof, probably never would be. There was nothing concrete on which to hang his suspicions, and yet he was convinced that he was right. In the glare of the midday sun, he was back in the deep-shadowed veranda at Banihal. It was as though he could actually hear the voices, see the chowkidar and the two blanket-smothered figures; something passing between them. How much, he wondered, had they been obliged to hand over to the chowkidar to let them work on the Chevrolet's brakes and steering column? One thing the mysterious "they" hadn't reckoned on; that he would not be riding in the Chevrolet.

It was the sort of situation you read about in ninety per cent of the paperbacks. But it had never occurred to Warren that he might one day be the centre of that kind of a plot. What would

their next move be? Automatically, he put his hand up to the shoulder holster and gazed curiously round the serene countryside, feeling naked and, above all, alone. No good mentioning his suspicions to either Gopal or Chandra. They'd probably think him mad, and certainly talk; the last thing he wanted. As for reporting the matter to the Srinagar police, it would only be to invite a thousand awkward questions.

He couldn't resist walking over towards the little group. Polite, Gopal got up and came to meet him.

"Well!" he said. "How does it feel to be alive after your lucky escape?"

Gopal's complexion was still a cadaverous grey, and he was still sweating over-profusely.

"Bad," he said, shaking his head. "Stomach is still turning over with thought of morning, and too am worried, much worried." He went on agitatedly, "Am asking self how can salvage taxi? What to do for best? Life is presenting too many problems."

"I shouldn't worry too much," said Warren. "Naturally, I'll do what I can to help when we get to Srinagar. You can always get another taxi; but if those wheels had turned the other way, you couldn't have got another life."

"Is very kind," murmured Gopal. "Is very kind."

As casually as possible, Warren said, "Did you sleep well last night?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Gopal sadly. "Sleeping most soundly not dreaming of tribulations of morrow."

"Sorry I've kept you waiting," said Warren, pulling his chair closer to Chandra. "I've been having a chat with Gopal. He's still very shaken by that business this morning. So am I. Sort of delayed shock. Although the sun isn't down, I think I'll have a whisky—sorry, a peg—while we're waiting for the soup."

"Don't be too long," said Chandra. "I don't eat breakfast. I'm always hungry by this time."

"I told the khansama to bring the food straight away. I want the drink more as a medicine than for pleasure. Another thing: it was ages before I could get to sleep last night." He looked at her quickly.

"Probably the mountain air," said Chandra. "It affects a lot of people like that, to begin with."

As he'd hoped she would, she tried to persuade him to stay at Moti Ram's. The house, she said, was enormous, and she kept repeating how much her uncle loved the British. He countered by saying that he couldn't possibly turn up as the uninvited guest, and that in any case he'd be so busy he'd have to be independent. Her obvious disappointment pleased him. She was insistent, though, that he would let her call for him the next morning and "show him round". It was rushing matters a bit, but he told himself that Chandra was pretty enough for any cover story.

They had nearly finished the pudding—tinned apricots—when the bungalow shook, and seemed to sway, to a terrific explosion.

Warren jumped, nearly choking; then cursed his nerves. So far he didn't seem to have the makings of a born secret agent.

"No-one is trying to blow us up," said Chandra coolly. "It's just one of our jets. We've got American and French jets. Everyone says ours are better than the Pakistani Russian ones."

"Extraordinary," he said. "Even here in this sort of Garden of Eden, one doesn't seem able to get away from the jet-atom age."

"Who wants to?" she said quickly.

His nerves were still tingling. He looked at his watch.

"It's getting on for three," he said. "Do you think we could make a start? I'd like to be settled in by the evening."

He pulled her chair back. As she got up, he found himself staring down at the gleaming brilliance of her hair, and was urgently aware of the perfume of her body, an erotic blend of sandalwood and jasmin. To help her, he put his hand on her arm, small, roundly smooth, the skin texture like fine silk. She got up very slowly, leaning her warm body against him before turning and lifting her face. It was as though in the dark pools of her eyes his gaze misted and drowned. The world was her lips; parting.

He muttered "Chandra" and put his arms round her. Letting his hands run slowly down her back, he pulled her towards him, feeling her lips melting.

At the far end of the veranda, he remembered, there was a half-open door. Through it would be a shadowy room, cool within shuttered windows. He tightened his left arm round her shoulders, sliding his right arm down the length of her legs to lift her and carry her over. He felt that she had gone limp, that she wanted him as much as he wanted her; then suddenly her hands were pressing into his chest and she was hissing, "No! Let me go! Quickly!"

Her voice was so urgent that he obeyed instinctively. Looking round, feeling angry and frustrated, he saw Krishnan at the head of the veranda steps, hands by his sides, eyes averted.

"What is it?" asked Chandra, with a hint of shrillness.

The bearer muttered something in Hindi.

There was a short pause before Chandra said, "It's the taxi driver, Gopal. He's had a heart attack or something like that."

"Good God!" said Warren, half shouting. "I thought he looked ghastly when I was talking to him. We must get him to a doctor. Is he fit to travel?"

"He's dead," said Chandra.

Warren looked blankly from Chandra to Krishnan. He wanted to say something, but it was as though paralysis had struck him; the paralysis of fear. Not the fear of an unseen enemy, of death from an unknown, unrecognised hand, or of dying under a

bright sun in the soft green Kashmir fields. Despite the vast spaces surrounding him, he was numbed by claustrophobia. He should have known better than to come to India. He was trapped. The country had got him fast and would never let him go. It was the beauty and the horror of it; a murderous duality.

Chandra's face was embodied desire. Her eyes were fixed on him and her lips seemed to be quivering as if still tasting his kisses; and regretting them. Of pity, not a trace. Her indifference was horrifying, but—and as he realised this Warren was sweating with horror of himself—not repulsive. He wanted her as much as ever, and was almost impatient with Gopal for dying so inconveniently.

"Dead?" he echoed stupidly.

"Yes, poor man," she said, quite without feeling. "Shall we go?"

"Go?" he echoed again. "But, I mean, we can't just go—leave him . . ." He gazed round helplessly.

"When we get to Srinagar, Krishnan will inform the police, and the bungalow staff will make arrangements to have him burnt."

"But his family! What about—?"

"If he's got a family," said Chandra impatiently, "the police will get in touch, and someone will come and collect the ashes. We really must go. It's getting late."

He said, suddenly obstinate, "Wait for me in the car. I'll be with you in a second."

"Where are you going?"

"To look at Gopal. I suppose he really is dead."

The body, uncovered, had been dragged round to the shady side of the go-down wall. Queer, thought Warren, staring down at the man he'd been talking to less than an hour previously, though all his weekends back in England were spent training how to kill, this was the first dead man he had seen, and he found himself wondering at the stillness and fixed stare of the thing at his feet. Queer, too, how little emotion he felt, confronted by this strange shell of flesh that had so completely nothing to do with the living counterpart.

India again! Could you really get worked up over the death of one man, in a country where you discussed, as a matter of course, the impending death from starvation of seventy million?

"You speak English?" he said to the khansama who had emerged from the go-down.

"Little."

Warren nodded at the body.

"What happened?"

"He eating. Then he stand up—and oh!"

In excellent pantomime the khansama put his two hands to his chest, groaned, rolled his eyes, groaned again, then made a gesture of falling on his face.

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On his way to the Peugeot, Warren saw a line of vultures perched in patient immobility on the bungalow roof.

"I'LL fix the houseboat for you," said Chandra as they drove along the straight, poplar-lined road. "Most of the houseboats really belong to my uncle, so I can make sure you're not cheated."

It was dusk when they reached the outskirts of Srinagar, and the city was a mass of shadows. Warren was aware of it, rather than seeing it. Aware of the tall houses, tall trees, the deepness of distant shadows which were the surrounding mountains, ramparts of a giant's castle. He was aware of moving crowds, men stepping lightly, and the passing flash of eyes, the sudden vivid smile, of a lithely swaying girl.

The houseboat Chandra arranged for him to hire was tied up on the edge of the Dal lake, the far side of the city. It was enormous. Like a de-masted galleon, Warren thought, as he walked round the roof deck, lined by flowers and creepers in window boxes; down to a deep-carpeted sitting room, armchairs and sofa covered with printed chintz; a ponderously Victorian dining room, and then into a passage off which opened three bedrooms, each with its own bathroom. Chandra introduced a middle-aged Kashmiri who had joined them unobtrusively.

"This is Rahman Ali," she said. "He's the owner. He and his family live in the doonga tied up alongside. He's a very good man and he'll look after you and feed you really well."

"It's marvellous," said Warren. "But it's far too big for me, and probably too expensive."

"Money is of no importance," said Chandra.

"Glad you think so. I only hope Indian law doesn't consider debt a prisonable offence."

"I shall be round early in the morning," she said, ignoring the remark. "Don't oversleep."

"I won't." He hesitated. "You know, I'm sorry to bring this up again—but about telling the police about Gopal. I feel it's very important."

"I promise that Krishnan will go round this evening," she said. They were at the head of the short gangway, and she repeated, "Don't oversleep. I shall be early."

She gave him her hand coolly, though her eyes were luminous. The evening was caressingly warm and, in the humidity, the blue and gold sari clung to her slight body. Again he was swept by longing for her.

His mouth drying, he said, "Good night. I won't oversleep."

Used to "do it yourself" England, Warren was almost embarrassed, to begin with, by the staff's attentions.

Rahman Ali told him that the bath would be ready in ten

minutes, led him to a chaise-longue on the roof deck and then, as if by magic, produced a chilled whisky and soda. The dinner, after the hot bath and another whisky, was elaborate. In solitary state Warren sat at a table which could have seated eight. The meal, of mulligatawny soup, fresh lake fish, mutton chop, and an egg savoury, was served by one of Rahman Ali's sons, while Rahman Ali himself, after uncorking a drinkable bottle of white Bordeaux, hovered in the background.

The meal finished, replete, he stretched himself out in the sitting room—too many mosquitoes on the roof, Rahman Ali warned him—with a cup of coffee and a glass of brandy. The fears of the afternoon were all gone, as was the claustrophobia. What a pity he had to get to work so quickly, instead of being able to relax and enjoy himself.

He wondered whether the war everybody was talking about would break out at any minute, and if it did, whether it would make things easier or more difficult for him. Frontier controls would be infinitely stricter, but dominated almost certainly by spy phobia. As long as his papers were in order he ought to be all right, and the short time he'd been in the country should react in his favour.

Yet it wasn't the thought of the five-figure cheque that was haunting him, or the job ahead. His mind kept turning back to Qazi Gand. Every time he tried to work out a plan for getting the diamonds through the customs, his thoughts misted and from their writhing obscurity emerged Chandra. The moist fire of her lips still smarted.

He finished the brandy, and immediately Rahman Ali was beside him with the bottle.

"A long one," said Warren, "with soda. And don't wait up." Funny the way he was talking as if he'd been accustomed to being waited on all his life. "You can leave the bottle on the table."

To salve his conscience he tried to be sentimental about Gopal. The effort was a failure. Fate? Gopal had been meant to die that day: 3 September 1965. The morning's accident could have been due to neglect—neglect that Gopal would hardly have cared to admit. Warren even began to doubt his suspicions roused by the chowkidar and the two blanketed figures, as he dismissed Gopal finally from his mind.

He was reaching for the brandy when Rahman Ali came in.

"What is it?" asked Warren sharply. "I told you not to wait up."

"An officer wishes to present his compliments, sahib."

"An officer? I don't know . . ."

In spite of the modern green uniform and peaked service cap, the figure in the doorway could have stepped out of a book of old Indian army prints. It was the square, dated, military frame, the hawk-like fierceness of the eyes, and the rival fierceness of

the ample, carefully upturned moustache. Struggling to his feet, Warren noticed a major's crown on the wide shoulders.

"So sorry to burst in on you at this hour of the night," said the officer in perfect, rather too suave English, "but I have to rejoin my unit this evening."

"I'm very pleased to see you, Major," said Warren carefully. "Won't you sit down? Can I offer you a drink?"

"Thank you very much. I can't stay more than a few minutes, but I'd very much appreciate a whisky. By the way, my name is Rajindhra Singh, and the object of my call is to thank you for having escorted my fiancée over the Banihal this morning. It's a tricky road at the best of times, and with a shooting war just round the corner, you never know what you might run into."

"I . . ." said Warren, feeling rather like a small boy caught stealing apples. "I'm only too glad. It was pure accident. Meeting Miss Naranjan, I mean." Tough, he was thinking, as Rahman Ali mixed a whisky and soda, humourless, not Chandra's type; old school and, perhaps, dangerous.

"I heard about this lucky meeting quite by chance from Lieutenant Pertab Singh, the commander of the convoy which held you up, you may remember." Rajindhra Singh took a sip. "Good health, Mr. Harley."

"Good health."

"Pertab Singh also happened to mention that you were a journalist. A free-lance—and it occurred to me that I might be able to help you."

"That's very kind of you."

"Not at all."

"And really," Warren went on quickly, "the good luck was all mine. But for Miss Naranjan, I couldn't have been in Srinagar this evening. In fact, I might well be somewhere at the bottom of the ravine."

"Yes! I heard about the accident," said Major Rajindhra Singh. "I've just left Pandit Moti Ram's house. The post, I'm afraid, has been irregular lately and, again, but for Lieutenant Pertab Singh, I wouldn't even have known that my fiancée was here."

He finished his drink, allowing Rahman Ali to refill his glass.

"But about your job here in Kashmir, Mr. Harley: I think I might arrange for you to pull off what I believe in your profession is known as 'a scoop'. That is, if you're interested."

"Naturally, I am."

A trap, somewhere? What else could he say?

"I can't go into details for security reasons," said Major Rajindhra Singh, "but I can tell you that my battalion will be, so to speak, in the front row of the stalls when the balloon goes up, as it will at any moment. Now, always provided that you're prepared to run a certain amount of physical risk, I might be

able to arrange for you to be attached to my battalion as official war correspondent. How does the idea appeal to you?"

"Enormously," said Warren, as casually as possible.

"Good! I'll do my best then. Probably it will take three or four days before authorisation comes through the official channels. But I presume you wouldn't have come all this way if you were in a hurry. You'll be staying in Srinagar?"

"Probably. I think Srinagar is as good a base as any."

"Excellent. I'll do my best then, Mr. Harley. Now I really must be off. I hope you have a pleasant stay. I gather you'll be meeting Pandit Moti Ram tomorrow. He will be a great help. He is a most hospitable man and a confirmed Anglophile."

"I'm looking forward to meeting him," said Warren, far from certain that the major shared Moti Ram's apparently notorious love for the British.

You may not have a sense of humour, thought Warren, after Rajindhra Singh left, but you're a cunning bastard! I'll have to move fast, and leave the sight-seeing for the next time. Damn that officious Sikh lieutenant. I'll enjoy telling Alfie Mannheim that one can be a bit too clever sometimes.

He was not surprised that Chandra arrived early, or that she was obviously upset.

Without lingering over his chota hazri, Warren was dressed by half-past seven. At eight he had finished a large breakfast and was on the roof deck, absorbed by the sense of magic that comes from the dawn contemplation of a new world. He was trying to take in the full canvas of the lake's blue calm, the green of the giant chenar trees, set in the sparkling mountains' frame, when a gondola-like boat, curtained awnings amidships and paddled by four crouching Kashmiris, came gliding over the water to tie up alongside. Moving like a cat, Chandra came aboard.

"Did he come to see you?" she said breathlessly.

Her anxiety made him feel calmer, at the same time giving him a sense of self-importance.

"Sit down," he said. "Would you like tea or something? Have you had breakfast?"

She threw herself impatiently on to a wicker chair.

"I don't want anything. Please! Did he come to see you?"

"I take it you mean Major Rajindhra Singh. Yes, he did."

"What did he say? Was he polite?"

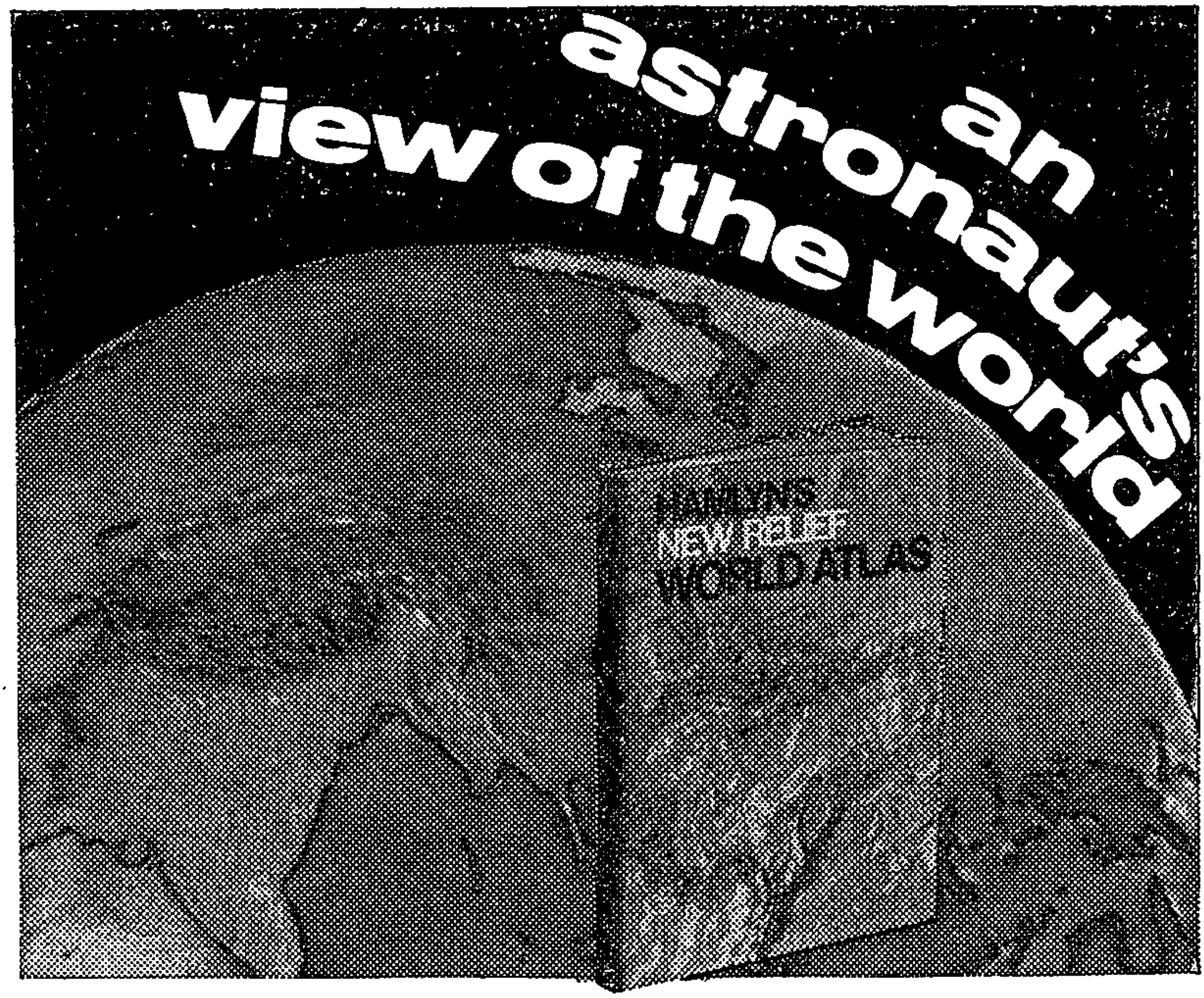
"He was not only most polite, he was most helpful," said Warren, watching her carefully.

"Helpful? How?"

"He's going to try to get me attached to his battalion as war correspondent."

"No!"

Her eyes went wide, and Warren was sure it was genuine fear



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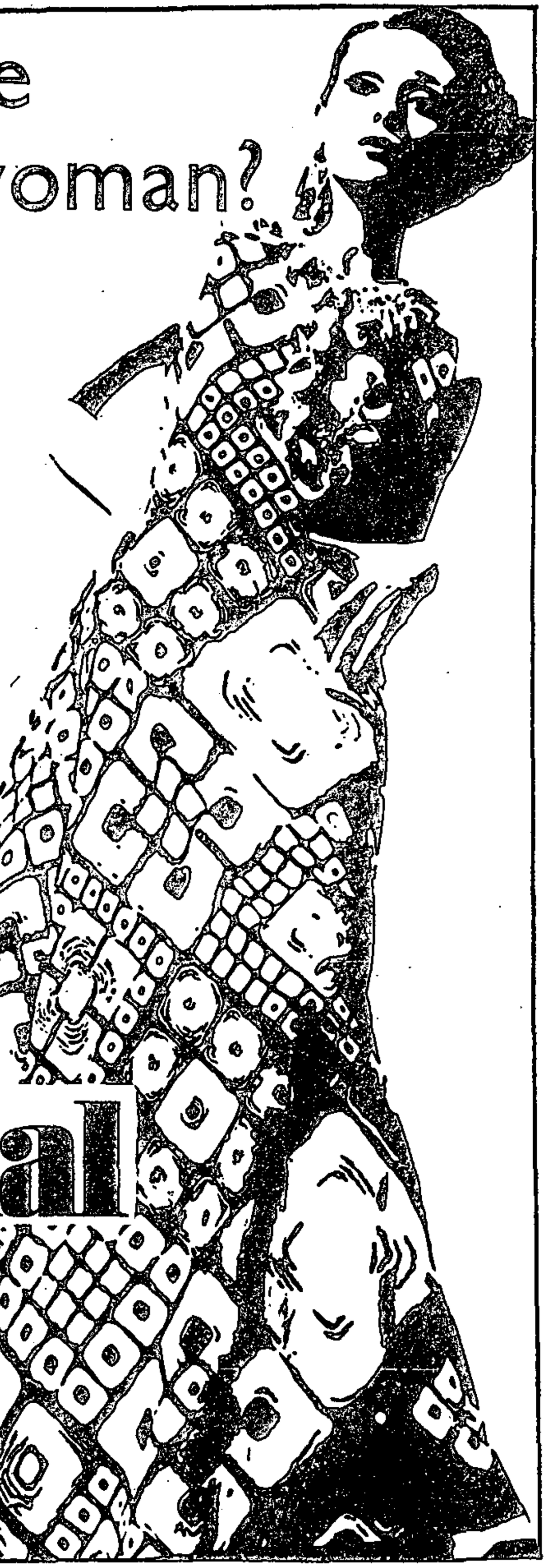

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that he read in them. Her hands covered her mouth, as though only by the gesture she could stop herself screaming.

"It was very kind of him," he went on. "The answer to a journalist's prayer."

"But you mustn't go," she hissed. "Whatever happens, you mustn't go. This is India, not England. Rajindhra's furiously jealous. I don't know what that horrible Sikh told him. You'd never come away alive."

"You mean," said Warren quickly, "he'd have me—er—liquidated?"

"I'm certain of it."

Her lemon-coloured sari was transparently light. She might be slim, Warren was thinking, but she wasn't flat. The sari's folds dropped away from, yet clung to, her breasts.

It was no good. He couldn't keep up the banter act.

"I don't blame him," he said. "If I were your fiancé—I think I'd feel murderous in the circumstances."

"Perhaps you wouldn't have occasion to," she said quickly.

She was pleased by his remark. He could see that, and her eyes lighted up again as she went on. "But it means we can't waste any time. We must talk to my uncle about it. The shikara's waiting, we'll go straight to the house."

"But your uncle might not want to be bothered."

"He's waiting."

It was rushing things a bit, but Chandra was right; they'd got to move quickly before he was taken off, willy-nilly, to the war.

Somewhere, Warren had read of the erotic properties of Kashmir shikaras. As he sank back beside Chandra on a rug-covered mattress, his back supported by a clutter of silk cushions, while one of the paddlers discreetly drew the curtains so that they were enclosed from the back and both sides, he reckoned the unremembered author had not exaggerated. Even the paddle blades were heart-shaped.

Swinging away from the houseboat into a slight current, the shikara edged along the lake shore, and then turned off into a muddy canal.

Warren's hand touched Chandra's, and her fingers interlocked with his. Her head rested against his shoulder. Her eyes were half closed and, as he had imagined they would do, her lashes spread over her cheeks. He had to fight the longing to kiss her.

The canal was becoming crowded as they penetrated the city outskirts. Flat-bottomed boats lined the banks. Women were washing clothes, pots and pans, in the filthy stream. Half-naked children played on the decks. Barges, weighed down with fruit, paddled, or poled like a Thames punt, drifted past. The passers-by stared, neither friendly nor hostile.

As though the nervous strain had been too much for her, Chandra remained silent, and Warren was content not to try to

make conversation. Moving silently through the water, feeling the wooden hull quiver slightly with each thrust of the paddles, was soothing. Though he had slept well, Chandra's nearness, the warmth of the sun and a vague drone of lazy insects were making him drowsy.

He was half asleep when Chandra sat up.

"We've passed the Third Bridge," she said. "Look! There's the house."

Its five asymmetric storeys rose straight from the canal. As though built without any architectural plan, windows and balconies projected haphazard, hanging over the water precariously. Beneath a latticed veranda, the shikara tied up at a marble landing stage from which eleven steps led to an elaborately-carved, arched doorway.

There was a musty smell inside; the smell of a house dominated by moth-balls. They were taken down a long passage to a vast room. The passage was almost pitch dark, and the room lighted only by persistent rays of sunlight defying the closed shutters.

Warren had the impression that with the passing, perhaps, of centuries, the shutters had never been opened. That if they should be, then the huge Victorian armchairs, sofas, velvet-covered occasional tables, the pictures in their gilt frames—Warren found himself staring fascinated at *The Monarch of the Glen, The Old Chain Pier at Brighton* and the *Mountains of Mourne*—would crumble to instant dust like the contents of an ancient sarcophagus.

It was not for some seconds that he realised that, like a pale ghost among his familiar shadows, Pandit Moti Ram was holding out a small hand in welcome. Guided into an armchair that would not have been out of place in the Athenaeum, Warren found himself being pressed to take a "dish of tea".

Hypnotised by the unreality, the room, the frail figure of Moti Ram himself in his high-necked, spotless, white frock coat, and jodhpurs, the three white-clad servants who had materialised rather than entered, he said, "I'd love to." But, even if the diamonds could be smuggled out successfully, he wondered exactly how his host would react to the England of the second half of the twentieth century.

"You will, of course, do me the honour of staying to luncheon," said Moti Ram in his soft, precise English, deliberately stressing the word "luncheon" and so rejecting categorically the more normal "tiffin".

"I'd love to," said Warren again.

"My dear," said Moti Ram, turning to Chandra, "your aunt is rather poorly today and will be keeping to her bed. Would you be kind enough to give the orders?"

It was a good couple of minutes after she had left the room

before Moti Ram said, "Our good friend Mr. Mannheim managed to let me know that you would be calling on me, Mr. Harley."

Warren was relieved to get back to reality.

"I hope I haven't been too quick about coming round," he said.

"I think your meeting with my niece provides the necessary excuse for your presence here, Mr. Harley. In fact, it would have been perfect if only her fiancé, Major Rajindhra Singh, hadn't got to hear about it. He was not in a pleasant mood when he visited us last night. Not abusive, you understand. On the contrary, almost too quiet. I believe he called in to see you after he left here."

"He did."

"I think you can count on at least four clear days," said Moti Ram, after Warren had repeated his conversation of the previous evening. "He can't move without official permission, although he has got influence at Army Command."

"You really think this war is coming?"

"As far as I can gather, it's started already unofficially, as it did in 1947."

"All the more reason, then, for me to get moving. Could you perhaps . . ." he hesitated, "let me have some details?"

Sitting by Moti Ram, Warren began to think about the five figure cheque whose crisp image Chandra had pushed temporarily from his mind. You could still do a lot, even these days, when five scribbled figures on a slip of paper translated themselves into a credit account.

Moti Ram sighed.

"In a normal world there would be no problem. But, alas, Mr. Harley, we are not living in a normal world. After all," he went on, becoming more animated, "these diamonds. They are my property, bought with the money I earned honestly and, in the earning, doing no harm to any living soul. There are not many, Mr. Harley, who can say that about the money they have earned. And yet, to dispose of them, I must resort to subterfuge and ask someone else to run risks. Is it, Mr. Harley, I ask you, is it fair? Is it just?"

"Of course not."

Time, Warren had heard so often, had not the same fervent value in the East, even in the East of the sixties, as in England, but, all the same, he was getting impatient.

"My business is crumbling," Moti Ram went on. "How can you expect tourists to spend money only to risk finding themselves in the middle of a battlefield, bombed, shelled, shot at? I never thought to leave my home, Mr. Harley. But I am too old to make a fresh start in life as a beggar."

"Of course."

"My only hope, then, is my diamonds, as I explained to our

dear friend when, many years ago, I saw all this sad trouble impending. What I did not foresee, however, was that the law would forbid me to dispose of my own property."

"You couldn't move to, well, Delhi or Bombay? Sell your diamonds, but still live in India?"

"No-one would give me a proper price, Mr. Harley. The Finance Department would step in. I would be charged luxury tax, property tax, capital gains tax, arrears of income tax. I would be accused, most likely, of not declaring my true capital. Probably I would not realise, in the end, one tenth of one per cent of their value, and that would be lost in legal expenses.

"Again, as perhaps Mr. Mannheim explained to you, my collection of stones is more or less common knowledge. Never could I, or any of my family, manage to transport them out of the country. In fact, it is a near miracle that this house has not been searched on some pretext or other. No, Mr. Harley, my only hope left is yourself. And yet it is a matter of constant anxiety to me to think of the risks you will be running. I ask myself, should I allow it?"

"I'm taking the job on willingly," said Warren firmly. "So you think there will be risks?"

"Inevitably, Mr. Harley. If the customs decide to search you, and the stones are discovered, as they would be, nothing could save you from a term of imprisonment. It would not be comfortable in one of our gaols, Mr. Harley."

"That's a risk one has to take as a matter of course. But what about other risks, non-official, for instance? You heard about my taxi, and the driver?"

"Yes! Chandra told me that first of all your taxi had had an accident, and that a few hours later the driver died of a heart attack—delayed shock, I imagine—while you were having luncheon."

"It may not be as simple as that," said Warren quickly.

"It is impossible to tell," said Moti Ram after hearing the story of the chowkidar. "It could have been that the two men you saw wanted shelter for the night, a corner to spread their blankets, and paid for it. On the other hand, I have enemies, jealous enemies. But how could they have known your true business, Mr. Harley, and, if not, how could you yourself have made an enemy or enemies in so short a time? Even so, it may be a warning and it shows we must be quick."

He got up, walked over to the door, opened it, then came back again. "Mr. Harley," he went on, "believe me when I say that this business has been tormenting me. After a sleepless night and many hesitations, I have come to a conclusion, and I hope you will agree."

"Yes."

"We must confide in my niece."

"Do you think—" Warren began nervously.

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"Mr. Harley! By nature I am a man of dreams and ideals," Moti Ram interrupted sadly, "but life has taught me to be strictly practical. I admire Major Rajindhra Singh, but he is not the husband for a girl like Chandra, as I've told my brother, though he won't listen to me. It will be to my niece's advantage if you get those diamonds to London. I will explain to her that once the sale is made and I have the money, an account will be opened in her name in a London bank.

"I don't approve of the youth of new India, Mr. Harley, but I realise I must come to terms with it. Without someone to guide you—and whom could I trust?—you would never even find what you have come for."

THE Dal lake was deserted. Under the fierce early afternoon sun the water was more shimmering silver than blue. Naked except for a pair of drill shorts over his bathing trunks, Warren lay back on the heaped cushions, the sun tingling on his legs and torso. Still in her light sari, Chandra lay beside him. From the stern came a grunting chant as the four paddlers dug the heart-shaped blades into the water, and the long curved bows sent little waves rippling out into the silver spread.

It would be some minutes before they reached the bank, green with orchards. Warren moved on to his side and kissed Chandra lightly on the cheek. She twisted her head, and then again her mouth clung to his. He pulled her close to him. They sank into the giving mattress, the whole of her body outlined, imprinting itself on him.

Only the actual moment counted.

He should have been concentrating his thoughts on the work ahead for which he had been sent half-way across the globe's surface. Instead, all that mattered was the rising excitement and rage at not being able to relieve the desire of his body. And it was at the very moment he felt all control going that Chandra, moving away, whispered, "Not now, please. We're getting near."

The shikara was approaching the mouth of a canal with willow-lined banks that cut between apricot orchards. People were moving about under the trees. Flushed and uncomfortable, Warren turned over on his back as the shikara slid from sun-drenched lake into the shady canal.

Dragonflies darted round them. A kingfisher poised on a branch watched their approach; then, diving like an Olympic champion, vanished below the purple-grey surface, reappearing a few seconds later, the silver slither of a tiny fish clenched triumphantly in his long beak. From the heavy-leafed chenars, cooing turtle doves raised a counter harmony to the chanting of the paddlers. In the background, challenging the blue vault, stabbed the snows of the Pir Panjal range.

"The Shalimar Gardens are just at the end of the canal," said

Chandra. "We'll walk round like ordinary tourists; then you say you want a swim. Everything ought to be all right."

Once again Warren was impressed by Chandra's extraordinary calm. She had shown no surprise or any other emotion when Moti Ram told her the real reason for "our friend's" presence in Srinagar. The few suggestions she made were highly practical. Hers was the idea of a preliminary visit to the Shalimar Gardens—"just in case someone might be following us . . ." How fear-nagged, though, Moti Ram must have been, he thought, to have committed his hopes of financial salvation to the Dal's muddy bed. Now he could understand Alfie Mannheim's interest in his frogman training.

A number of people were enjoying the Gardens' cool. Families had been picnicking on the green lawns beneath the chenar trees, and now, while the parents slept soundly, children played round fountains and fretted marble water-slides, and in and out of formal flower-beds of zinnias and huge scarlet cannas.

Fashionable nudity had not got its grip on the Kashmir valley, and for the sake of convention Warren put on a tee-shirt; yet even so he felt peculiarly undressed. Europeans were conspicuous by their absence—the war threat, he supposed; and in the peace of the Moghul garden, with its aura of a vanished elegance, he was troubled by the feeling that he was nothing but an alien barbarian.

Chandra talked away happily. He wished he could share her insouciance. Instead of the flowers, pictures of a weedy lake-bottom floated through his mind. Would there be a current? Cloying slime? He was reminded of the cliché about needles and haystacks, and wished he could divine the secret of Chandra's apparent confidence.

They stopped beside a marble slab, dominating three terraces falling away like green steps to the entrance.

"This is where the Emperor Jehangir used to sit watching his subjects on feast days, when the common people were allowed in," Chandra explained, before leading him up to a higher terrace, the last, sheltered by an inner wall.

As soon as they penetrated into this hidden garden, Warren was obsessed by a fragrance that was more than that of blossom and scented earth. He felt that somewhere in this hidden garden was the perfume of an eternal presence that the soil had never reclaimed as its own, as he contemplated a sad, black marble pavilion, with geometrically carved walls, surmounted by a three-tiered pagoda-like roof, standing in the middle of a desolate dry tank, and surrounded by fountains from which no water played.

"No-one was allowed in here," said Chandra softly. "This was the women's garden. It was Shah Jehan, Jehangir's favourite son, who built this pavilion for his favourite wife." She looked up, smiling. "Shalimar means 'Abode of Love'. People say that

sometimes Shah Jehan and his wife would spend days alone here. He must have loved her very much, even though he was a Moslem."

She leaned, deliberately provocative, against a marble pillar.

"How would you like to have been the Emperor, Warren? Would you like to spend days just making love? Or are you too practical? Would you think it a waste of time?"

"You know the answer to that," he said unsteadily.

"Do I?" she said, still smiling. "Do I?"

"I—I think we'd better go now," he said. "I'm getting a bit on edge. I envy that Emperor . . . too much."

Not answering, she turned away and walked towards the door. Before going through to the main garden, she stopped.

"Warren!"

"Yes?"

"Do you remember, you said we might find the answer to my problem? Do you remember saying that?"

"Yes, I do remember."

"I'm sure you will. A real answer. That's why I'm not worrying any more."

They were silent again as they were paddled back through the canal to the lake. Warren had stripped off his tee-shirt, and his snorkel and under-water gun were beside him. When they were well out into the lake, he let his hand trail over the side. The temperature was that of a tepid bath. Chandra was pointing ahead and, fascinated, he watched the distance between the shikara and the tiny Char Chinar island lessening.

The island was impossibly prim; like a toy in a model pond. Square, each corner of the square planted with a giant chenar tree, a miniature pavilion in the centre.

"The chenar on the north-west corner." That was where, Moti Ram had explained, after paddling past at least fifty times, and then fifty times more on the pretext of visits to the gardens, he had one evening, five years ago, let the bag of diamonds drop from his hand opened below the surface, so that it had sunk without splash or betraying ripple.

"I had made up my mind," he said, "that I would rather they were lost for all time than fall into the hands of greedy officials, thieves, or invaders." And, spreading his hands: "A negative expression of a positive fear, perhaps."

Water about twenty feet deep. Scattered reeds; no current. In spite of storms, the bag should still be there; probably in a niche of the reeds. The plan was simple. The shikara would pull in on the east side. Rugs would be spread and a picnic tea unpacked on the bank, while he swam round, diving in search of a forty-pound mahseer.

Suddenly, as the shikara was very close, Chandra seized his hand and whispered, "Do you really think you've a chance?"

"If it's true there's no current and the reeds aren't too thick, it's a question of patience and, to a certain extent, lung power. It's a blessing the water's so warm; there won't be any worry about cramp. Make a show of getting the picnic ready," he added, "and if possible don't let any of the crew hover round the other side."

After the shikara had tied up, Warren waited for a few minutes till the paddlers were busy helping Chandra to unpack; then, fitting his snorkel and flippers and picking up his gun, he dived near the shikara, striking down till the swaying reeds came up to meet him, and he was kicking his way slowly through the underwater jungle.

It wasn't too bad. The reeds grew, not over-thickly, in scattered clumps. He could make his way through them without the panicky sensation that they were clutching, carnivorous fungi. The long blades lay against his threshing legs, light and slimy, but without clinging.

Then he was lucky. Undisturbed by his presence, a small mahseer floated past. His arrow skewered it neatly behind the gills. He surfaced to throw it, flapping, beside the vacuum flask.

Chandra made a splendid show of clapping, and calling out "shabash" several times, while the boatmen nodded approvingly. Taking off the snorkel, he waved to her and shouted, "I'll try the other side for a bit and see if I can really earn my tea."

He dived in, this time from the headland by the south-west corner. He stayed down for some minutes seeing nothing, surfaced and splashed around, then, edging slowly towards the chenar tree overhanging the north-west promontory, dived a third time, noting anxiously that the reeds were thicker.

Plunging straight at the first thicket—the water was beautifully clear even at that depth—he held the gun up with his right hand, probing round with his left in the twined stems. There was nothing. He surfaced, swimming around so that he could be seen from the shore, then dived again.

When he came up for the fourth time, Chandra was standing under one of the trees. Her face was in shadow, but he guessed the effort she must be making to seem unconcerned when she called in a small but steady voice, "Don't be too long! The tea's getting cold."

Nerves probably were making him shiver in spite of the water's warmth. But he couldn't give up, even if it meant staying in the water till night fell, and starting again next morning.

Shikaras were now passing frequently across the lake, but no-one slowed down or showed the slightest interest in them.

"I'll try another couple of times," he called back, "then I think I'll have had enough for this evening."

It was after he'd dived for the second time. His fingers, groping blindly, touched something smooth, slippery; a waterproof casing. Then, as his heart jumped painfully, his touch moved

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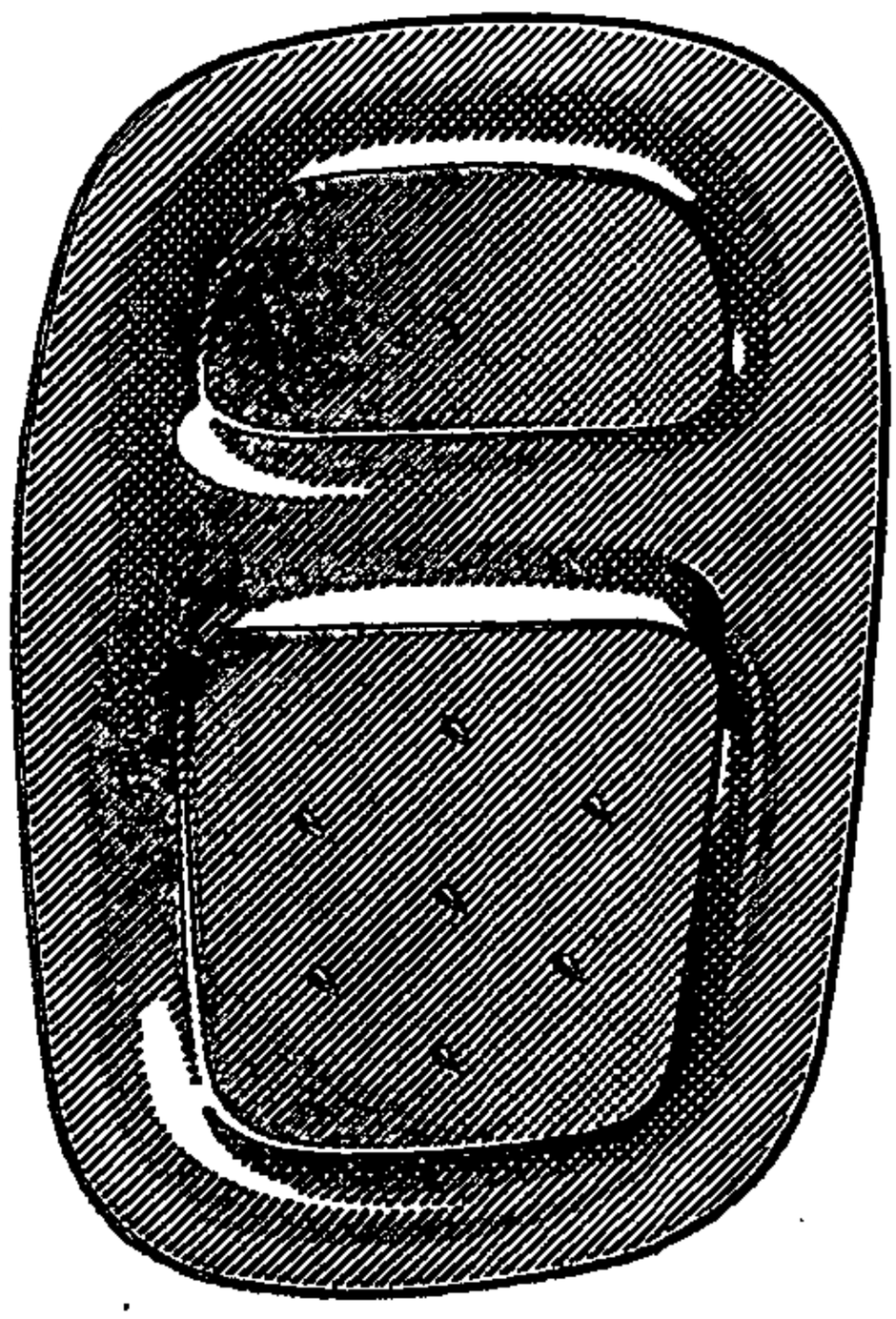

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over the hard pebble-like outlines. The stones' weight had pushed the bag deep into the heart of a spongy mass, and he had to pull hard to free it. Choking with excitement, he pushed it down the front of his trunks, then hovered like a basking shark half-way between the lake's bed and surface so as to get a grip on himself before striking out for the shore.

How ridiculously easy it had all been, he told himself triumphantly. All his fears and doubts had proved to be nothing but phantoms of an overwrought imagination, worked up by an overdose of crime and espionage literature. It needed a lot of acting to fake disappointment that the lake had apparently emptied of mahseer, and to eat a conventional tea, happily uncomfortable, with the stones pressing into him.

Chandra, he thought, almost overdid her part. He expected some responsive light from her eyes, a movement, a gesture. Instead, and he couldn't understand why, she was surly. He nibbled dutifully at a tomato sandwich, a cucumber sandwich, a mutton-sprinkled-with-curry-powder sandwich, and an oversweet chocolate cake; and when the interminable tea was over and the hamper was being repacked, he said quietly, "At any rate, the first part of your problem is solved."

He was baffled when she said, "Not really," and turned away.

On the way back, Chandra let her hand lie in Warren's palm. She kept gazing into his eyes as though trying to hypnotise him, but was unwilling to talk, only answering him in monosyllables.

Hurt and disappointed, Warren felt anger invading him. Chandra had nothing to do with him, he told himself resentfully, and she was nothing to do with the job. She was just there; a very minor element, a pleasant medium for passing the time. She was pretty, and he couldn't pretend he didn't want her. But now he could think of saying goodbye, or not necessarily of saying goodbye. What he'd got to do was to concentrate on the next stage; the tricky one. After that, Alfie Mannheim's office, the five-figure cheque in his wallet, and some real amusement out of life for a change. He wasn't so sure about those marriage-with-Janet plans; not straight away, anyhow.

It was only when they reached the houseboat that Warren remembered that it had been arranged that he should take Chandra to dine at Nedou's Hotel, and he was wondering if he could get out of it when she said, "Could I come on board for a few minutes? Perhaps we could have a drink to—to—"

"Celebrate?"

"Yes—in a way."

"Make yourself comfortable," said Warren as soon as they were on board, his black humour vanishing. "I'd be grateful if you'd get Rahman Ali to fix the drinks. I'd better get some clothes on. Won't be a minute."

Going straight to the bathroom, Warren pulled off his shorts and bathing trunks, and stared fascinated at the bag. It was of

soft leather, wrapped and tied in oilskin. Holding it in his left palm, he ran his right hand over it, feeling the hard contours. How many diamonds were there? What was the fortune in gold, sterling or dollars, he was balancing so casually? No question of putting the bag in some "safe place". He'd have to go about like an out-of-season Christmas tree. He wasn't looking forward to his next visit to a customs shed.

He was sluicing himself down with cold water when a siren began to wail. It had hardly finished its first scooping moan before a second, then a third and a fourth joined in. Within seconds, the sirens were little more than a minor overture. From the bund and the distant city, whistles blasted frantically. Men shouted. From the boats alongside female voices began to shriek in pure hysteria, while children howled their terror of the unknown, unseen, menace.

Warren pulled back the window curtain. Near the houseboat, a shikara swung in tortured circles, as though each of the four paddlers had lost his head and was trying to make for a different shelter. Along the bund, although there was no sound of engines from the purpling sky, men and women had flung themselves flat on their faces.

Knotting a towel round his waist, Warren ran into the bedroom. As he did so, the door opened and Chandra came in.

"It's only a warning," she said calmly. "But Rahman Ali's in a most awful panic and begged me to take shelter." She began to laugh. "It's really rather funny. My shikara men are weeping and saying their prayers, and just listen to the women! I didn't know people could behave like this."

She came up to him.

"You've got sunburned, Warren. Although your hair's so fair, your skin's dark. Almost as dark as mine. I like it."

Her hands lay on his bare shoulders, then fell caressingly to his waist. As his arms reached out for her, she moved out of his embrace. As he stared, half-stupefied, the sari seemed to unfold itself in swift coils. Then the silk of her flesh burned into him. The diamonds were forgotten.

It was later, as they lay tightly in each other's arms, that the All Clear sounded. The monotonic screech roused Chandra. With a sigh, regretfully, she disengaged herself from Warren's arms and sat up.

"I'd better get back on deck, now, darling," she whispered.

Warren nodded. He couldn't talk, but the few minutes while she dressed were enough for him to realise that his life had changed. There could never be a Janet in his life. And now, at last, he understood his grandfather.

She came over to the bed and kissed him on the forehead.

"I'll be waiting for you on the roof deck, darling," she said. "And don't get careless with these—now you've got them."

She dropped the leather bag on the pillow.

Warren fancied he read disapproval on Rahman's face when Chandra asked for a whisky.

There was a bare half-hour of daylight left. After the panic of the alarm everywhere was uncannily still. As though they could not believe that the danger, if it had ever existed, was past, the entire population seemed to have gone to ground. Bombs had been dropped, Rahman Ali insisted as he served the drinks rather shakily. He himself, he assured them, had heard, "Boom! Boom!" The bed of the lake had quivered, the water rippled unnaturally, and the boat trembled.

"I don't think it will be any good going to Nedou's tonight," Chandra said. "There'll be such a panic. I'll stay here a bit longer, then I must get back. Uncle will be half-mad with impatience to know what's happened."

"Don't go too soon," Warren said tensely. "You're lovely . . . lovely . . . I don't want you to go."

"Don't you? I don't think I want to go either." He could feel, rather than see, her eyes fixed on him. "But I must get back. Uncle will want to talk about what's to be done next. And I . . . I've got a lot to think about as well."

"Always your problem?"

"It's simpler now. In one way, that is."

"In what way?"

"You see, whatever happens now, I can never marry Rajindhra."

"Why do you say 'now'?" he asked, suddenly afraid to hear her answer.

"It's simple," she said. "Naturally, when Rajindhra realised I'd had a lover, he'd kill me."

Warren took a long drink from his glass, before saying slowly, "You don't mean that literally, of course."

"I do. You keep forgetting this is India, not England. No-one would really blame him; in their hearts, I mean. Not even Mummy and Daddy. In any case, I'd rather he killed me than be forced to live as his wife."

Warren finished his drink jerkily.

Why didn't he say, "There's no question of it. Marry me!"? Was that what she was waiting for? Why didn't he say it? No fear of harming his career, such as it was; of history repeating itself. These days one could be proud of being seen with a girl like Chandra, in London, Paris, New York. His whole body ached with longing for her. But he couldn't say it. He could say, "You're lovely, Chandra. I want you again . . . now." But the words, "I love you. I want you to marry me," wouldn't come. The more he sensed her tensed expectation, the more his throat dried up. Tomorrow, perhaps, when he'd had more time to think. God! Where had Rahman Ali got to? He wanted another drink badly.

He put out his hand to touch Chandra, but it rested vacantly

on the wicker arm of her chair, as he mumbled. "You're beautiful . . . beautiful. I can't . . . I'll never forget . . . "

He was only half aware that she had arisen from her chair. Then he was standing beside her and saying awkwardly, "Are you going already? Must you? It's still early."

"I'll be along tomorrow, early." Her voice had become very soft and very calm. "Good night, darling. Pleasant dreams."

When her shikara was out of sight in the dusk, and he could no longer hear the dip of the paddles, Warren went back to his chair. Rahman Ali mixed him another drink and left him.

"Mr. Harley!" The voice was a familiar one, startling Warren from his drowsiness. He heard Rahman Ali, as though protesting, then cut short by a snapped order.

Boots tattooed smartly across the deck. A tall, burly shadow silhouetted itself beyond the awning against the frame of the darkening lake, and Warren sat very still. Like an animal sniffing danger, he recognised the Sikh lieutenant, Pertab Singh.

© Patrick Turnbull 1967

Conclusion next month: In their desperate venture to escape with the diamonds, Warren and Chandra are trapped between warring armies and threatened by sudden death.

☐ **ABOUT THE AUTHOR. Patrick Turnbull was born in 1908, at Barberton in the Transvaal. He was educated at Bedford School, and later at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. On being commissioned in 1928, he was posted to India; but he left the Army in 1932, and lived in Morocco until the outbreak of the Second World War, when he rejoined. He won the Military Cross during the retreat from Dunkirk. For a time he was stationed in Gibraltar, and afterwards served with the Indian Army in Burma. He finally retired from the Army in 1956 and went to live in the South of France with his wife and two young sons. He has written historical novels set in the Napoleonic period, the best known being** The Last of Men **(Hutchinson, 1958). Other work includes** The Foreign Legion **(Heinemann, 1964), a history for which he was given access to official sources.**

SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM ON PAGE 102

The difference between their ages remains unchanged. Let us call this difference x *years. At one time Ben was exactly twice as old as Richard; so at that time Richard must have been* x *years old and Ben twice* x *or* 2x, *and* 2x *is also the age Richard will reach in 10 years' time. Now, therefore, Richard is* 2x *less 10 years old, and his father* 3x *less 10. Their combined ages come to 125; so we can say that* $(2x-10)+(3x-10)=125$, *or* $5x-20=125$. 5x *must be 145, and* $x=29$, *which is the difference between the ages. Richard's age,* $2x-10$, *is* $58-10$, *or 48, and Ben is 77 years old.*

BOOKS

REVIEWED BY JAMES LEASOR

whose latest thriller
Passport in Suspense *has*
just been published

□ SHOCK FOR SHADOW. "I was following this girl down Piccadilly. I have followed girls before, of course, all kinds of girls in all kinds of places, but this time it was different."

Just how different is borne out by the next 253 pages, for the speaker is John Brock, a relative newcomer to the already crowded ranks of private eyes, secret agents, dicks and spies. He is an original, a modernised blend of Lemmy Caution and Philip Marlowe, with the currently O.K. cover job of working in an advertising agency, while also employed by a vague organisation headed by someone only referred to as The Fat Man.

The exact status of this group is never really defined, but like too many fictional security agencies and too few real ones, it has virtually unlimited power and authority. And in *I Was Following This Girl* by Desmond Skirrow (Bodley Head, 21s.) John Brock needs all he can get of both.

The girl he follows is Kiki Kondor. ("Not just the richest girl in the world. According to William Hickey, to name only a few, she is also the most beautiful.") And he is following her on the orders of Washington because Mrs. Morton Fairchild the Fourth wants her followed.

Now, if Kiki Kondor is the richest young woman in the world, Morton F. the Fourth is the richest old woman. As one character modestly describes Morton's wealth, she "can buy up General Motors between two bites of a beefburger". And Mrs. Fairchild plans a marriage between Kiki and her own weak, effeminate son Newman, a creature who in Brock's opinion is "the most inadequate of all inadequates who flap their soft hands around the fringes of business".

Even so, these particular soft hands are metaphorically of gold, and Old Mother Morton wants him married because then she can have an heir. ("It's Morton Fairchild the Sixth I'm putting into production.") So much money is at risk with this marriage or merger that the expectant grandmother has put all the facts

about Kiki through the "big IBM at Cape Canaveral", just to make sure that Kiki is as sound mentally, physically, financially, as she appears.

Understandably, with stakes piled this high, others may want the girl for their own, and Brock's task is to keep Kiki safe and unattached until her marriage within a few days. At the same time Brock is ordered to "keep yourself corked, sex-wise," by Morton F. the Fourth, in case he starts having any fancy ideas about testing Kiki's breeding capabilities himself.

Thus admonished, thus briefed, he sets out to find his charge in her London pad. Police outside explain that Kiki Kondor is safely inside, and that a blonde girl had just left. But, inside, he finds a disturbing situation. The blonde girl is there, in bed. The girl the watchers saw leaving was actually Kiki Kondor, wearing a wig over her dark hair. So now the action starts. Where has Kiki gone—and how can he find her?

Brock is under no compulsion regarding personal corkability with this new girl. ("I can take it or leave it as fast as the next man," he explains. "And I almost never leave it when I can take it . . . So I opened my arms and she came into them like a ball into a socket.")

So. A lovely way to start an evening. But it doesn't end as either had anticipated, because Brock has a sudden rush of blood to the conscience and for once decides to leave it instead of taking it (" 'What?' she said, not believing her ears. And I said it again, not really believing mine.") He goes into the bathroom for he feels "the beginnings of a stupid pious glow where they say the heart is . . . So I went . . . to shower it away".

He turns on the shower. "It hit the back of my neck like the Severn Bore. The tiles came up to meet me and I fell headlong into a small eternity." He has been coshed by someone hiding there. When Brock comes round the room is as full of police as strawberry jam with seeds. The blonde lies dead. And he is charged with her murder.

So that's the scene. Desmond Skirrow takes it from there, and like the ad says, the best is yet to be. Altogether, this novel is a fresh and original tale, but towards the end the wisecracks and Brock's physical prowess and indestructability both begin to pall. A little less of all three would have improved the book.

☐ **DEIGHTON PLACE.** Some people are prophesying the end of the present vogue for fictional secret agents. They are wrong. Like Raymond Chandler, I believe that the surface of the spy theme has barely been scratched. I suggest you read Len Deighton's new novel, *An Expensive Place to Die* (Cape, 21s.),

for he is one of the best weavers of fact and fiction—and he defies you to say where one begins and the other ends.

Paris—considered by Oscar Wilde as an expensive place for a foreigner to die—is the setting for this novel, which opens with his anonymous agent, through whose eyes all the action is seen, waiting in his flat. He has been there for several months, through the winter, apparently a travel agent and a freelance journalist. Now it is spring. ("The birds flew around for nothing but the hell of it. It was that sort of spring day; a trailer for the coming summer.") It is also a trailer for coming events, for with him is a courier from the British Embassy to give his orders.

The Chinese are working on their atomic bomb, but without following the earlier path of the Russians, British and French, by producing plutonium in atomic reactors. They are throwing all their weight into direct hydrogen research. ("By pushing the megaton instead of the kiliton bomb they could be the leading nuclear power in eight or ten years . . .")

But what the industrious Chinese ants do not know is that this would still not make them impregnable to atomic attack or reply. The Atomic Energy Authority has publicly minimised the dangers of fall-out for reasons of their own, and the Chinese have believed them. Now, after further tests, the AEA realises that the fall-out dangers are nearly as high as their critics claimed.

In Paris, in a curious clinic run by a man, one Datt, with an abiding interest in sexual experiments and deviations, is Kuang-t'ien, apparently an odd-job man from the Chinese Embassy, but, in fact, one of China's senior nuclear scientists.

The task of Deighton's agent is to put not false papers, but the true results of the AEA experiments, into Datt's hands so that he can show them to Kuang-t'ien, who will realise their significance and the implied warning that China, even with her own H-bomb, could still be dangerously vulnerable to atomic attack. If the papers are allowed to fall into Datt's hands too easily, he will think they are false; if it is made too hard for him, he may refuse to become involved.

Deighton's agent hides some of the papers in an old armchair in his flat, and allows the hint to be dropped that he has something of value to Datt. Then he lets events take their course. They do not follow a direct route; but, although the plot twists like a corkscrew, it is always plausible.

As a reader of all Deighton's books, I think that this is his best. It has none of the needless convolutions of plot that characterised his earlier works. It is written with compassion; his characters are people, not cardboard cut-outs. They feel the blows, they admit

their age, they admit their disappointments, and something of humanity's eternal discontent and that nostalgia for a golden past, that never existed, plus an appreciation of the delicate nature of love.

As Maria, the ex-wife of a French policeman, who still works for him, although her marriage is ended, puts it: "Friendship is less infirm and less fragile than love." No-one who has ever loved would disagree.

☐ **THE QUIET KILL.** In contrast to these two novels of suspense and hard action is *Strike Out Where Not Applicable* by Nicholas Freeling (Gollancz, 18s.), where no millions of money, no future nuclear warfare are at stake; simply this question: Did a fat Dutchman fall off his horse at a riding-school in Holland and die by accident—or was he murdered?

The new commissaire of police for the area is Van der Valk. He feels that promotion has passed him by; all the crime he has to solve is routine. But then his wife, who rides at the school, tells him casually of Bernhard's death, and perhaps that is not quite routine. For his wife adds that there is a rumour—nothing more, of course—that the local doctor isn't entirely satisfied.

Van der Valk drives out to the school and begins to ask questions. Nothing seems out of place, no glaring discrepancies. Bernhard had run a smart local restaurant with his wife. In fact, he had spent most of each day at his own table in the corner, greeting a special guest now and then, while his wife and Saskia did the real work. And who is Saskia? Well, she's a sort of good friend of Bernhard's widow. Could that also be a reason for wanting fat Bernhard out of the way?

One question leads to another. Van der Valk asks them all. The people who go to the riding-school every weekend seem more keen to be seen there in each other's company, boasting of their riches, than actually riding.

There is the lovely blonde Janine, who, by any other name and in any other society, could be envied for her looks, her youth, her gaiety, but here she is looked down on because her husband made his money as a professional bicycle-rider in France. Could she have been having an affair with Bernhard?

There is Francis, who owns the riding-school; Francis, with his clipped accent, aping the cavalry officer he had never been. But even he is not quite the simple jovial fellow he strives so desperately to appear. He beats his wife; he keeps a private collection of erotic books hidden in his bedroom. Had he also a deeper secret hidden in his mind, something that the fat old Bernhard discovered and used as a lever for blackmail?

Freeling's book has all the slow pace of a pastoral; it should be read on a sunny afternoon in the meadows. As I have said, I don't think that the spy novel has done more than begin to explore the possibilities of its field, but I do think that this sort of gentle tale seems a little dated. The world has moved on to mass deaths, imminent destruction. Against this background of rumbling overkill, the death of one man lacks its old compulsion.

☐ **LAST ILLUSION.** In *The Saddest Summer of Samuel S.* by J. P. Donleavy (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 18s.), Samuel S. is an American who "had arrived at an age when the flesh begins to go its own way, and the spirit struggles to hold it back". The field for this particular battle is Vienna. There he lives an unsatisfactory life between mildly lecherous encounters with a rich old countess and Herr Doktor, his psychiatrist; sinning with one, confessing to the other, and growing old among his dreams, like all of us.

Into his existence—I can hardly call it life—comes a promiscuous, nubile American girl. Samuel S. faces the saddest decision of his saddest summer: Should he sleep with her or not? If he does, will it lead to the antiseptic vision of happiness in the American idiom, or will it lead nowhere at all? For Samuel S. is not only a dreamer, he is an idealist, divorced from the reality of life.

Here is the girl of his dreams, and yet isn't she safer to remain in his dreams? All night he puts unconvincing arguments for not going to bed with her, and in the morning he dashes to tell his psychiatrist. Herr Doktor listens gravely and pronounces him cured. But of what? Of his illusions, his dreams, his inability to conform, to accept, to be one of the crowd?

He leaves the doctor's surgery, and realises he is crazy to let this girl, this unique timeless person, go out of his life. He rushes to the station to take her off the train that is carrying her away, but he is too late.

This altogether beautiful and nostalgic little parable contains the quintessence of young love, middle-aged sadness, and that moment when a man accepts that promise must, in the end, outrun all performance.

☐ **AN ADVENTURE TRIO.** Pierre Boulle, who wrote the brilliant book *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, now writes the story of his own war in the East in *The Source of the River Kwai* (Secker and Warburg, 25s.). A planter in Malaya, he served in the French Forces in Indo-China, and when France fell he returned to Singapore. When Singapore capitulated he trekked to Burma, and then went back to Indo-China as a secret agent. So

many people have asked him where he found the inspiration for *The Bridge on the River Kwai* that he has written this account to show how he picked up one incident here, another there. An absorbing story by a very brave man.

Jan de Hartog has a love of the sea that he can translate to his reader. In *The Captain* (Hamish Hamilton, 30s.) he tells a long story of the sea and the men who make their lives in the great ships. One of the best he has written.

In July, 1939, in the High Court of Justice, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Prideaux defended his military reputation. Was it true that he was "not noticeably among those present when he was wanted", as some claimed, in the winter of 1919 when British cavalry, fighting the Bolsheviks in South Russia, made their last charge? *Light Cavalry Action* by John Harris (Hutchinson, 30s.) is a brilliant reconstruction and eminently readable.

..... ALSO RECOMMENDED .....

Capable of Honour (Michael Joseph, 30s.) by Allen Drury. This is the third in his series of satires on the American political scene.

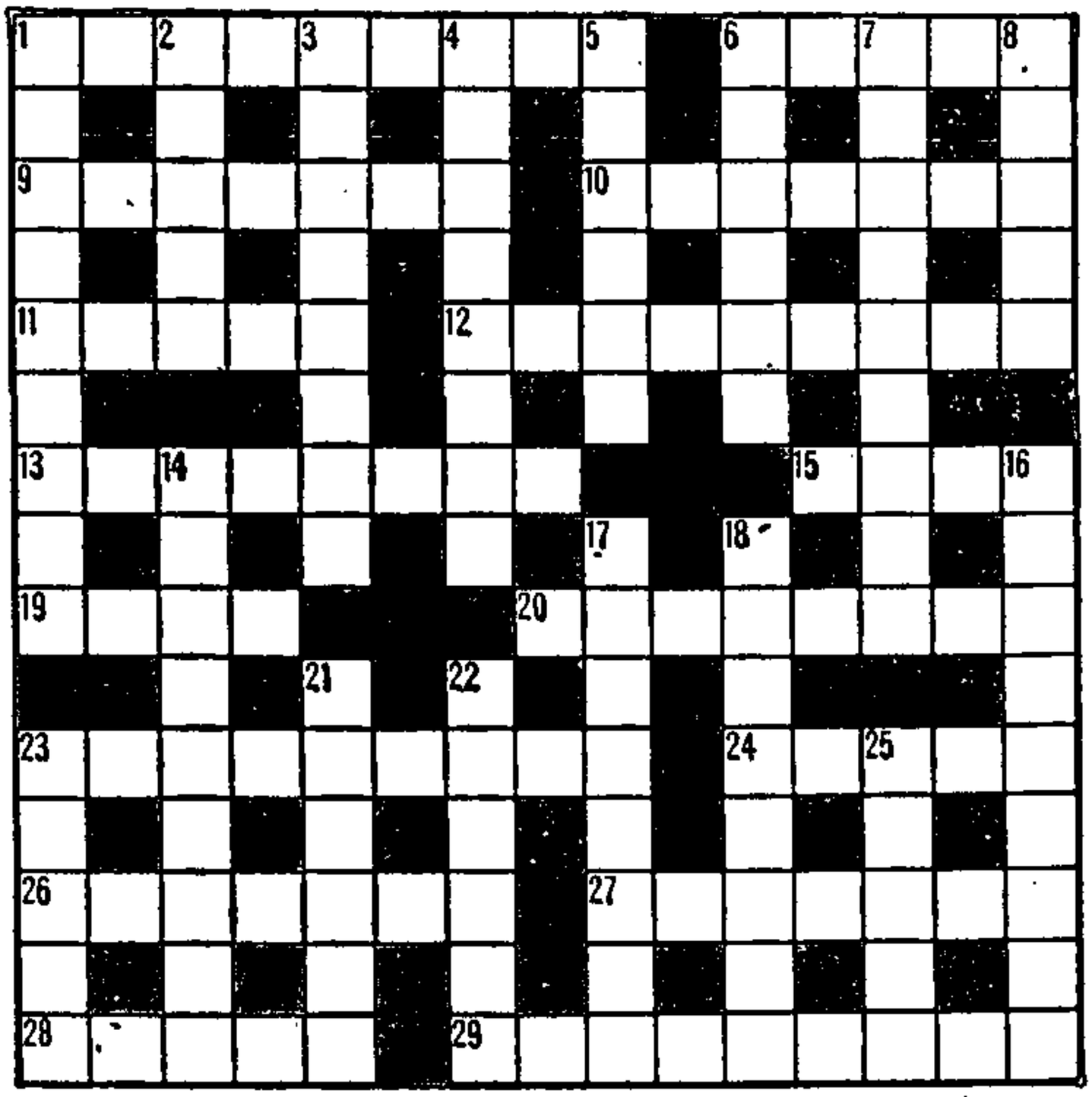
The events in Drury's novel are supposed to be happening in the nineteen-eighties, but are too close to contemporary realities for comfort. Two international crises occur almost simultaneously: a civil war in Gorotoland (an imaginary African state, for which one might substitute some other well-known battleground); and a take-over bid for power in Panama.

Forced by these events to take a dangerous stance, President Harley Hudson, who is the novel's most prominent character, changes from a vacillating leader into a tough-minded one. The conclusion of *Capable of Honour* finds Hudson being chosen at his party's convention as its presidential candidate, despite a split in the ranks. Drury has never shown greater skill than here, in the closing pages of this novel, where he evokes the strange, nightmarish world of an American political convention.—A.B.

Shark Island (Hamish Hamilton, 25s.) by Maurice Edelman. In his new novel, the author shows once again his ability to handle dialogue. In fact, on only thirteen of these 299 pages is there no dialogue. And he can cope with large groups of characters talking, the bane of the novel writer, without the reader once becoming confused as to who is saying what. He is not in Whitehall this time, but in the Caribbean, where the British Administrator of one of the less prosperous islands has to contend with government pressure to let in a syndicate of Americans to develop the island, but not in a way that the simple islanders would like to see things changed. An intriguing story.—W.R.

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Joking apart, yours lies broken (9).

6 Food of love? (5).

9 Girl eager to make cloth (7).

10 Greek island has wine for this Russian (7).

11 Stoke on this—for productive kilns (5).

12 "If thou appear—by solemn thought" (Wordsworth) (9).

13 Donkey starts taking for granted (8).

15 Objections reversed in the end (4).

19 American jerk (4).

20 Girl changes over. Can I? (8).

23 Years without parents? (9).

24 Hunt down for races (5).

26 Bird takes wing on circuit (7).

27 Comes but once a year (7).

28 Light type of song (5).

29 Wee slides adapted on Alpine slopes (9).

DOWN

1 A rusty can makes a place of refuge (9).

2 Where the cowboy does his shooting? (5).

3 Meteor IV gives extended employment (8).

4 Given a tanning (8).

5 Craft of a shy cat (6).

6 Sue M.P.s? Creates disorder (4, 2).

7 Past eight—makes a lengthy meal! (9).

8 Plastered in the bakehouse? (5).

14 Seaside reading? Somewhat abrasive! (9).

16 Two lovely specimens celebrated in song (5, 4).

17 Show respect for a new form of teen rave (8).

18 Floating voter? (4, 4).

21 "Tarquin's —ing strides" (Macbeth) (6).

22 Anserine group (6).

23 Lot we changed for this bird! (5).

25 Make the plea elsewhere (5).

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